



ODDS

AGAINST HER

M. R. Macfarlane

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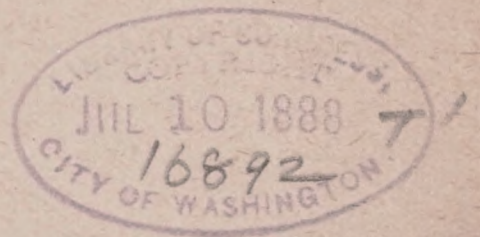
ODDS AGAINST HER

BY ✓

MARGARET RUSSELL MACFARLANE

AUTHOR OF "THE MAGIC OF A VOICE," ETC.

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ODDS AGAINST HER.

CHAPTER I.

EGON VON ARNIM stood on a corner of the Place de la Madeleine one bright afternoon in June, pondering over a telegram which he had just received from England.

He was not in the best of moods.

Surely it was inconsiderate of his brother to betake himself to America when he had such need of his counsel.

Confession is said to be good for the soul, but it was only after much struggle that he had made up his mind to confide in this possibly not over-sympathetic brother. Therefore it was trying to be denied the opportunity by an adverse fate, for Egon's ideas never flowed freely with the pen. When reduced to writing his peccadilloes appeared more aggressive and less worthy of forgiveness.

He bit his fair mustache and looked up the street reflectively. There was nothing of especial interest in his surroundings.

Close at hand a building was in process of erection. A mason poised a hod of mortar on his shoulder and began to ascend an unsteady ladder. Egon lazily watched his movements, thinking at the same time whether he had better take the night train to Berlin, in which case he would reach his garrison next day. While he deliberated a *coupé* approached and drew up near-by, the horses standing like statues. Egon studied the *chiffre* on the panel, and wondered idly if it was a private carriage or a *voiture de remise*.

Suddenly his eyes lost their absent look.

What had attracted his attention ?

On the carriage window rested a woman's hand, with delicately rounded finger-tips, and from a curious ring, formed of a snake with an emerald head and diamond eyes, flashed quivering rays of light.

There was a grace in the tapering wrist, suggestive of a long, lithe body. Those nervous fingers looked as though they might hold one

in the strong clasp of friendship or thrill one's blood with a subtle, caressing pressure. They had a magnetic attraction for Egon stronger than his will.

The woman must be beautiful. Why necessarily beautiful? She might be hideous, and the charm would be broken.

He laughed at his absurd fancy, and lifted his eyes to the mason, who was now like a fly on the wall above his head.

"I'll see her," he thought suddenly, "and dispel the illusion."

While he advanced towards the carriage two things happened. The coachman touched his horses, and drove away, and on the spot where Egon had lately stood lay the mason crushed out of all semblance to humanity.

The unknown hand had saved his life. He repressed an exclamation of horror, and glanced backward, but the crowd shut out his view—then hailing an empty fiacre that was passing, he called to the cabman:

"Follow that carriage, and a *louis d'or* if you overtake it."

The man set his hat straight on his head and stared at his crazy fare.

"*B'en, m'sieur,*" he responded, and chuckled to himself at the folly of being in love; for, with his worn-out nag, he might as well attempt to overtake the winged steed Pegasus as those fleet horses.

CHAPTER II.

EGON returned to his hotel annoyed at himself and his senseless impulse. The strange carriage had been lost in the crowd after a short chase, and he experienced the sensation of being deservedly beaten.

When he took up a book and tried to read, a delicate hand floated before his eyes. He turned impatiently towards the fireplace and saw on the mantelpiece a thick letter with the Saxon postmark. It was from his sister-in-law, Hulda von Arnim.

He forgot his recent experience in the thought of his bright, volatile Hulda, who laughed at him, and understood him at the same time, who might perchance love him some day if he had the good luck to win her. His face lighted with pleasure as he broke the seal.

SCHLOSS FELSENSTEIN, June —, 18—.

DEAR RUNAWAY: You certainly do not deserve a line from me after leaving without a

word of farewell ; but circumstances arise sometimes when it is best to take to one's heels. Foolish boy, so you thought I did not understand that you had gone to England to consult Franz. He isn't there, and when you learn what he has been doing you will think, as I do, that he had much better have staid at home. I cannot understand risking the sea journey except in quest of money. Franz is rich enough, although he did make his fortune in trade and disgrace the family, according to Uncle Heinrich. What does it matter as long as he has the money? If you were rich we might marry, and I could torment you at my leisure. Why didn't fate put you into trade instead of a cavalry regiment at G.? Things might have been different then. I see your eyes flash, my dear boy. You are quite ready to sacrifice yourself because you think you love me. Nonsense. You would have to serve an apprenticeship of twice seven years. Waiting is dreary, and the fancy will pass. After all, Egon, I am not sure that I don't love you. Sometimes I think I could die for you. Strange conceit ! Then I think of the details of life,—those prosaic details that kill love. Ah, could we live in a bower of roses on butterflies' wings, how charming life would be—but I want the pomps and vanities. I want them even more than I want you. Don't waste further thought on me. Forget me if you can. My better nature speaks now. So come back determined to accept the situation.

I wish you could look in on us now. Anna is nursing her rheumatism. She has a new pain

with a long name. Paul is as prosy and severe as ever. We are in a state of excitement over Franz's probable return. *Figurez vous*. He has discovered an unknown cousin in America. He does not descend to detail, but implores our consideration for her. Her name is Prasseda, and she is said to be Ulrich's daughter; said to be, I say, because the burden of proof is upon your chivalrous brother. He found this little savage sitting on a rock in some American mountains shooting at an eagle, and dressed in men's clothes. That is what Anna says, and since Franz wrote her I presume she read his letter aright. He writes legibly, which is more than I can say for you. They are expected daily. Therefore come home at once.

HULDA.

P. S. Don't take what I said seriously. I dare say I shall have forgotten it when I see you again.

P. S. If you come at once you will find no one here. Next week the house will be full.

To Lieut. Count EGON VON ARNIM.

Egon laid down the letter with a sigh. What alluring hopes she held out to him. And yet they could never be realized. Paul used to say in his cynical way, that she had married not his brother Friedrich, but his prospects. Those having died with him, she would never think seriously of a young lieutenant of dragoons

were he a demigod, much less a good-looking young scamp with nothing but debts to fortune. But why tempt him? Why thrill his heart by impossible suggestions? After all, were they impossible? Might he not with Franz's help go to America and make his fortune, but would she wait? Would she not laugh at him in the end for his pains, when, after years of exile, he should return to find her married perhaps to another?

He took up the letter and read it again from beginning to end, and resolved that he would go home and ask her to be serious, to decide his fate once for all. Then he would confess his sins freely to Franz, and give up his follies. His brother would initiate him into the mysteries of trade and make him rich for Hulda's sake. She should have the pomps and vanities she craved so much, and he should give them to her.

It was already growing dark when he rang for a guide to look up the earliest train for Berlin. If he left at once he might settle everything before Franz returned.

At the appointed hour he was ready and

eager to start on the journey which might prove the turning-point of his life. Passing down the staircase he met a young Englishman whom he had known slightly in Russia some years before. They were to be travelling companions that night, therefore the journey would not be dull. There were still a few moments to spare, and he went out on the balcony to light a cigar. Before him was gay, laughing Paris! Perhaps he was foolish to leave it so soon. Lights glittered in the square below. Branches of trees waved in the June breeze, and cast interlacing shadows on the asphalt pavement. Strains of music came to him from a neighboring café. The air was filled with the odor of roses, which stole into his brain. Stars sparkled in the clear sky. Surely this was a night for revelry and mirth.

The next balcony was shut off by a lattice-work, overgrown with vines, and on the railing was lying the bunch of roses that laded the air with perfume. In the street beneath a woman's voice was humming an air from a popular opera. Suddenly there was a rustling behind the partition, and a hand crept out to-

wards the flowers. Egon gazed as if spell-bound. He had recognized the hand, and the peculiar ring which stamped its identity. It hovered over the roses and touched their petals caressingly. Those soft fingers seemed so near his own. He had but to bend forward and take them in his grasp. Behind the network, he seemed to see the shadowy figure of a woman shrouded in a white veil. He felt impelled to spring forward and tear it from her face, but he drew back. Why should he attempt to solve this mystery? Were not his heart and interest Hulda's? It was already late, and his English friend was waiting. Why did he tarry?

Now all was still on the balcony. The lights were out. Had she gone? While he hesitated a clock struck the hour. He had loitered too long, and the train had departed without him. Then reaction set in. He would resist this absurd impulse to meet an unknown woman. Perhaps, through his trifling, Hulda had been lost to him forever. All night long he tossed and turned. The figure of a woman flitted by, enveloped in a filmy veil,

which entangled him in its folds and stifled him.

When he awoke the sun was streaming in at his window. François brought the morning papers with his coffee, and lingered.

"Has monsieur seen?" he ventured at last.

"Seen what, *imbecile*?" returned Egon, a sleepless night not having improved his temper.

"An accident to the Berlin express," stammered the man. "And Monsieur Gordon is—"

"Well?"

"Seriously wounded," cried François. "Ah! think if Monsieur had gone."

Egon lost his ruddy color for the moment. He scanned the paper hurriedly. It was true. There had been a collision. Many lives were lost, and heading the list of wounded was the name of Alex Gordon, whose hand he had pressed but a few hours before.

Surely man's life hangs by a thread.

"The *Sainte Vierge* kept you back," murmured François, devoutly crossing himself.

Egon started. Once more had the mysterious hand been stretched forth to save him from danger.

CHAPTER III.

THE head of the Arnim family was an old man, living estranged and alone on his estates bordering the Baltic, whose life had been embittered by the death of his two children.

He had quarreled with his son over some trifling matter, and Ulrich, then a high-spirited boy of twenty, had left his home, declaring in bitterness of spirit that his father should live to regret his injustice. Hot words were these, uttered in passion, but soon to be verified, for not long after the news came to Carlshöhe that he had been killed in the American civil war.

The blow nearly crushed Count Arnim. Prasseda, his daughter, did her utmost to console him. Ulrich had been saved so much pain and trouble in this world, which to her young mind seemed so cheerless. Life at Carlshöhe in the companionship of a tyrannical

father had not been all sunshine, and her brother's death in a land of exile made it utterly desolate. The poor child lost heart, and soon followed him to the land of shadows.

After her death the Count sent for Friedrich, the elder of his late brother's two sons, and made a will in his favor, declaring him heir to his property, both landed and personal, without restriction, his brother to inherit in case Friedrich died without issue.

Franz had broken loose from his associations when a youth and gone into business in England, where at the age of forty he had amassed a fortune. His uncle, while apparently discountenancing him, secretly admired his independence. Success in any form won his applause.

Franz was a silent, almost morose man. His early struggles had left their mark on a character originally open and impulsive. His passionate nature was hidden under a cloak of sullen indifference. Suspicious of strangers, he was blindly loyal to friends, but if his jealousy were aroused he became a madman, doubting even the evidence of his own eyes.

Once he had placed his trust, he was dogged in its defense. Yet in a woman's hands he was a child.

Egon was the son of a distant cousin on the Arnim side. He had been adopted by Franz's mother when a baby. Franz considered him his [special charge, and no one disputed his guardianship, for the boy was headstrong and wild.

After their parents' death, when Friedrich went to Russia as attaché and the younger tried his fortune in England, the little adopted brother was left at Felsenstein, but Franz always cared for him; he paid his college bills and later got him a commission in a cavalry regiment at Dresden. He found an outlet for his strong nature in love for this fatherless boy, and forgave him many a prank that merited severe punishment, finding a ready excuse for his follies. Egon appreciated his generosity, as most boys do who have never had a wish ungratified. He was a young lord among his mates. This rich brother was a liberal protector. Egon had but to ask and everything was given him.

All went well until Hulda Golof came into their lives. She was the daughter of a poor Russian noble at St. Petersburg. Friedrich met her at Court, and introduced his brother, who was visiting him at the embassy. She called Franz "the bear," and laughed at his awkwardness. It galled his pride. He had no ready speeches for her like his brother Friedrich. He was in trade, a stigma which his name and race could not outbalance. He was not rich in those days, and no one was surprised to hear that Hulda, whose only fortune was her pretty face, had chosen the heir to Carlshöhe.

Paul von Kempen declared her interest in her husband to be purely mercenary, nor could her pretty blandishments alter this opinion. She found his heart steeled against her, and hated him cordially in return. Paul's sister Anna, an old maid of fifty, chided him for his severity. The bride was so graceful and *distinguée*. Surely she loved Friedrich devotedly. It was such a touching picture to see them together. What mattered her lack of fortune, since she was noble? That was some-

thing. It was far better than marrying beneath him, as some people had been tempted to do.

The master of Felsenstein was silent, for if rumor spoke truly he himself had been charmed by the bright eyes of a forester's daughter in his youth.

There was one other member of the family who did not yield to Hulda's fascination, and that was the Count von Arnim. He seemed to share Paul's prejudice.

The young couple went to Carlshöhe soon after their marriage. During this visit there ensued a quarrel between uncle and nephew, the details of which were never known. It was whispered that the heir left his ancestral halls hurriedly in a state of rage against his choleric uncle. And the incident made little impression at the time, because every one knew that the Count was an intolerant man, with whom it was difficult to live at peace. Hulda shrugged her pretty shoulders when questioned, and remarked indifferently that it was Friedrich's affair, not hers; really she could not be held responsible for family jars. Later Paul thought her words significant.

When Friedrich brought his wife home Egon was a chivalrous boy, with a susceptible heart, which his volatile sister-in-law soon swayed. She was a year his senior; but this trifling difference gave her an advantage. It enabled her to treat him with a familiarity most dangerous to his peace of mind.

One day he realized with a shock that he loved her. Paul had seen and warned him of his folly. He exchanged into a regiment on the frontier, and tried to forget. Hulda understood the situation, and ascribed his exile to her enemy's influence. She missed him in her rides and walks. His merry voice had made Felsenstein less dull. She wrote him sisterly notes, which did not serve to banish memory.

About this time Friedrich died, and left Hulda a charming, penniless widow. His death had not entered into her calculations, since it left her entirely dependent upon the Count, who settled an annuity on her, conditional upon her never setting foot in Carls-höhe.

The malice was apparent, but she swallowed the insult and accepted the money, for there

was no option ; however, it was galling to her pride. She had set her heart upon being mistress of this insolent old man's Schloss in spite of his restrictions. Her husband had borne affront on her account in silence. Had he shown resentment his prospects might be ruined. He reproached her with not conciliating the Count, but she laughed and bade him bide his time. How could he expect her to cajole a barbarian ?

She lived at Felsenstein by invitation of Baron Kempen, part of each year. During his last hours her husband had wrung this promise from him. Friedrich's mother had been a Kempen, and the request seemed not unnatural ; but her presence was only tolerated, and Paul's relations with Franz were strained in consequence.

Hulda brooded over the condition set upon her allowance more and more. Paul's taciturn manner angered her ; but there was a way to outwit them all. She might yet reign at Carlshöhe, if she married the next heir. He was enormously rich now, and less of a bear. Although he had not spoken, she

knew by many tokens that she had but to stretch out her hand and he would be at her feet. Why did she hesitate? Why did she find grave reasons for postponing the inevitable, for it was her decided purpose to marry him at some future time?

Egon's regiment had been ordered back to Grimma, a garrison town not far from Felsenstein, and she was thrown into constant companionship with him again. She laughed at his boyish protestations, and treated them lightly, but could not make up her mind to throw him over. He was so simple-hearted and true, handsome and straight as a Viking. He loved her with a loyalty which touched her heart, although she rallied him on his earnestness. England seemed far away in those days, for she held Egon in a net as fine as her silken hair.

This was the reason why she half-encouraged Franz, and hesitated to commit herself. However, it could not last forever. The day was coming when she must decide; the boy was beginning to have too great a hold upon her heart. She had never

told him in so many words that she loved him, except in the letter sent to Paris, although from her looks and gestures he must have read the truth a hundred times. He had returned to Grimma the preceding night, and wrote her that he would come to Felsenstein early in the morning. Franz, too, was expected. She must settle her affair with him, and trifle with Egon no more.

Hulda lay in a hammock down by the lake at Felsenstein thinking of Egon. As she swayed to and fro, fanned by the June breeze, she could see from under her half-closed lids the swans floating on the water near the shady island. She had spent many an hour there dreaming with him, and the boat was still moored under the bank. Why did he not come?

The woods were full of summer sounds; birds twittered in the branches; the odor of new-mown hay was wafted from a field near-by. Hark! there was the rumble of distant wheels upon the highway.

"Egon is coming," she thought dreamily.
"He will seek me here."

She closed her eyes and pretended to sleep. He would be sure to look for her in her favorite nook by the lake.

There was an interval of silence, and then the branches parted.

Some one was there.

All was still again. Did he really think her asleep? She looked from under her lashes at the intruder.

It was not Egon who had disturbed her, but a young girl tall and graceful as Diana. She was gazing at Hulda through the leaves, her lips parted in a smile of childlike wonder. The sun flickered through the rustling foliage and touched her hair with gold, while she stood motionless, fearing to wake the sleeper.

Instinct told Hulda that this vision was Praseda. A sudden chill passed over her, but she gave no sign, and the branches fell together noiselessly.

Danger was near.

This girl with the fierce Arnim blood would make a formidable adversary. Could they prove her the legal heir? Hulda's eyes lighted with malice. Never while she held the key.

Confused sounds reached her from the house. Some one was calling.

“Hulda, Hulda!”

The forest rang with her name. They must not find her there. First she must think.

For an hour she wandered through the park struggling with herself. She could not bear to face the inevitable. It meant parting with Egon. She must put a barrier between them that could not be swept away. Her love for him was her weakness. He must come soon, for it was nearly noon, and he had promised to be with her early. At a stile half-way between the wood and the high-road she waited. Yes, he was coming. He had dismounted and sent his horse on by the servant, taking the shorter path by the lake. How handsome he looked, crossing the field with a swinging step, in his dragoon uniform!

“You came to meet me!” he exclaimed, stooping to kiss her outstretched hand.

“Art sure?”

Even then she could not help coquetting with him.

“Hulda, I am here. You bade me come.”

She drew him down playfully on the wall where she was sitting.

"Are you glad to see me, Hulda?" he began, his voice trembling slightly. "You meant all you wrote? You love me, Hulda?"

"One writes foolish things sometimes, Egon."

"You don't know how happy it made me to think that you really cared for me. If you would wait just a little while I might have a home for you somewhere, perhaps in America."

"In America!" she repeated, as if dazed by his words.

"Yes, in America. I will go to Franz and ask him to help me."

When he mentioned his brother's name a shudder passed over Hulda and she drew her hand away.

"No, Egon!"

"Why not? Who could advise me better than Franz? He made his own fortune, and knew as little about money-making once as I do!"

Hulda looked away over the fields. The tower of Felsenstein was visible in the dis-

tance. She seemed to hear Franz's voice still calling, "Hulda, Hulda!"

She tried to laugh and turn him from the subject. He was going too far. She had not thought he would take the matter so seriously. "You must not speak to Franz," she said resolutely. "I forbid it."

He was puzzled by her tone, and even then did not understand that she had been trifling with him.

"Can you mean that you do not love me?" he questioned.

When she looked up and nodded an affirmative he threw himself down beside her and seized her hand almost roughly.

"It is not true," he said passionately. "Oh, Hulda, don't be cruel to me."

Her heart quailed at his change of tone, but she must be firm or lose all.

"Egon," she answered, passing her hand gently over his bowed head, "Do you not know that ambition has ruled my life? Friedrich was but a stepping-stone to wealth and power. See then how impossible it is for me to marry you."

She told him this bluntly. Unless she showed determination he would never believe her; he would go on protesting and pleading. She could not bear the strain. If he understood once for all, how little chance there was he would desist.

All Paul's warning words came back to his mind. It was true. She had acknowledged it frankly. He drew away from her and stood erect. There was no appeal in his attitude, now.

"Why did you write me and raise false hopes, Hulda," he said reproachfully. "Why were you so hard on me."

"Because," she answered, looking into his face, "although I can never marry you,—never—I loved you, Egon. I warned you at the same time, you remember."

It was quite fair, he would listen to reason.

His lip curled.

"You loved me," he repeated in contempt.

His tone stung her to anger. She had been willing to concede something. She had humbled herself in acknowledging her weakness, and he threw back her avowal with scorn.

"But never so much that I could not have thrown you over for another," she said with cutting emphasis.

Her cold answer was fuel to the flame.

"My brother Franz has fallen into your late husband's shoes. Why not for him?"

"He might do admirably."

"Why do you say this to me? Why make me hate all women?"

"Nonsense!"

The light died out of his face, leaving it pale and drawn. She was engrossed in tracing figures in the ground with the point of her parasol and did not see him.

"Very well, Hulda," he said, after a pause. Good-bye."

The dull monotone of his voice hurt her.

"Let us part friends," she said, holding out her hand. Her short-lived anger had died.

"Friends?" he echoed with scorn. "You and I? Before the world, yes; but apart, no. I hope I shall never forget the courtesy due my brother's widow," he added, bowing low. "But I shall never forgive you your cruelty to me."

With these words he stalked off in the direction whence he had come, but recently full of joyous anticipation. She looked after him wistfully, and half extended her hand to call him back.

“When I have done the work so well!” she muttered. “He will get over it.” And she turned toward the house resolutely.

CHAPTER IV.

ON the road between Leipsic and Dresden, an hour's drive from the old town of W——, lies Felsenstein, a large estate belonging to the ancient family of Kempen.

The "Schloss" is a gray stone pile rising from the ground like a castle in a moat. Its walls are bare of ornamentation. There is no portico over the entrance. Two stone steps lead to a massive iron door, over which the arms of Oertzen and Kempen intertwined are carved in stone.

The road approaching Felsenstein is shut in by stone walls, which are broken by a high archway leading into the paved court-yard. Here a stately oak stands and spreads its branches up to the sloping tile roof of the Schloss.

On the east side there is a balcony supported by Doric columns, which are covered by a mass of tangled vines. A beautiful terraced garden

extends down to the edge of a lake, where swans move listlessly about seeking food among the rushes near the shore.

From the garden, steps lead to the balcony by which one enters the drawing-room on the second floor. In the corner, overlooking the court-yard on one side and the terrace on the other, are Anna von Kempen's boudoir and sleeping-room. Beyond, in the front of the house, are her brother's apartments.

Two doors open out of the hall on the ground floor. The left leads to the billiard-room, the right to the sunny dining-room, from whose walls a line of good-natured Kempens look placidly down upon their descendants. They have never been remarkable for anything but their antiquity. Some of their women have been noted beauties, and all of their men stanch supporters of the king. Beyond is a long garden-room with stone flooring and some excellent frescoes. Through the pillars that support the balcony above one can see the stately forest, a background of unbroken foliage, on the farther side of the lake. The forests of Felsenstein have always been

noted for their extent and beauty. Upstairs there is a great hunting-hall set with carved tables and chairs. This is used for large dinners. On the walls hang trophies of the chase grouped artistically. Several suites of guest-rooms lead from this hall. They are often occupied by officers quartered at the Schloss during the summer Manœuvres, while their soldiers are assigned lodgings in the village below.

The master of Felsenstein was a grizzled man of fifty, tall and spare. Nothing escaped his keen black eyes. Although he played the cynic, at heart he was kindly and generous.

Felsenstein had been in the Kempen family from time immemorial. Formerly they had been Roman Catholic, but under the régime of the present baroness, Paul's mother, who was a stanch Protestant, everything had been changed. She abolished many of the old customs, among them the resident chaplain, and allowed the chapel to fall into picturesque ruins. Now she was an old woman living on a distant estate. Once a year she came to Felsenstein

and set everybody by the ears. She still possessed remarkable vigor.

Although her strong hand had summarily settled Paul's romantic episode with the forester's daughter, she could never forgive him for his folly. There was a decided lack of sympathy between them, even after the lapse of years, perhaps because their natures were too much alike. Anna, on the contrary, was weak like her father. The old Baroness had no patience with her.

"Let her live with Paul and keep him out of mischief," she said with grim sarcasm; and Anna, who often took her mother seriously, amused Paul at times by adopting her tone.

The garden roses nodded in the breeze, the bees hummed lazily and wandered from flower to flower, while Anna sat under the trellis vine before the garden-room door counting her stitches.

Near-by Paul sipped his coffee and read the morning paper.

"Where is Hulda?" said Anna, in a fretful tone. "Breakfast is long over—you too are lazy."

"I was out in the woods hours ago looking at the lot that Hans wishes to cut to-morrow."

"Well! There's no excuse for Hulda. What with Franz and this wild girl who is coming—"

"Franz is a sensible fellow," interrupted Paul, looking up from his paper.

"*Ach, Gott!* She may be an Indian!"

"Perhaps an Indian princess, in which case she might be forgiven on account of her rank."

"The natives are Indians, I am sure, Paul," replied Anna, in protest against her brother's air of raillery. "I learned that in my geography."

"My dear sister, you are behind the age."

"It is just like a man to twit a woman on her age."

Paul was silent.

"I knew something dreadful would happen. What shall we do with her?"

"Leave that to Franz."

"Franz is devoted to Hulda."

"There's many a slip," returned Paul, nodding expressively.

He finished his coffee and rose.

"The future will settle these matters. The pawns are set; now to begin the game."

The door opened at this juncture to admit a servant with his eyes starting from his head in fright.

"*Ach, gnädiger Herr!*" he exclaimed; "a *droschke* is driving up the hill, and a black woman, like the one we saw at the circus last week, is sitting in the box."

"Paul, they are coming," said Anna, all in a flutter.

"Tell the servants to assemble in the court yard, Johann," said the master, somewhat severely.

Although he ignored the man's untimely remark, the servant felt the rebuke, and, somewhat abashed, disappeared to carry his news further.

"Did I not say she would be a savage?" observed Anna tearfully. "Oh, that I should ever live to see this day! A blackamoor with the name of Arnim!"

"Don't be a fool, Anna!" was her brother's terse rejoinder. "Come!"

A *droschke* was driving into the court-yard. A black woman sat beside the coachman, as Johann had said. Her yellow turban peeped out from under a large poke bonnet, which made her an object of curiosity to the bystanders.

Hardly waiting for the carriage to stop Franz sprang out and assisted a charming girl to alight.

"Here we are at last," he said, extending his hand to Paul and Anna. "So we have given you a genuine surprise."

Anna was speechless. Her eyes were riveted on the "Indian princess" in amazement. Did this bewitching product of civilization really come from America?

"Have you no word of welcome for Praseda," asked Franz.

"Welcome," repeated Anna, a sense of relief stealing over her. "Why, she is delightful,—quite like the rest of us. My dear child, we are very glad to welcome you to Felsenstein."

She kissed the new-comer on the cheek effusively, and Praseda thanked her for her cordial greeting.

While Anna went to order a breakfast for the travelers, Paul walked with them through the garden.

"I am tired of your cities," exclaimed Praseda, with glowing cheeks. "Here are endless woods. One might almost forget that they are bounded. How delightful the country is!"

"Where is Hulda?" asked Franz, as she left them and strolled toward the lake.

"Somewhere about. You did not prepare us, you know. I fancy hunger will drive her home soon. She has not breakfasted yet."

"Do you think she will like Praseda?" questioned Franz, anxiously.

"Do women ever really like each other?"

Just then Praseda came hurrying towards them, breathless with excitement.

"I have seen your Hulda," she said, "asleep in a bower."

"Did you wake her?"

"I left that for you, Franz. Come."

When they reached the hammock by the lake, the nest was empty, for the bird had flown.

CHAPTER V.

PRASSEDA'S advent at Felsenstein caused no little comment among the neighbors. They had never heard of this new relation who sprang from the unknown into their midst. That morning, as they sat smoking in the garden-room, Franz told Paul the strange story of his finding her among the Adirondack Mountains. The child had won his fancy by her simplicity and unaffected manner, and he listened to his cousin's adventures with keen interest.

Franz had been tramping through the Adirondacks after finishing his business in New York. He had heard much of their picturesque scenery. By accident he got separated from his guide and wandered into a disused trail. A lake opened suddenly before him. It was near sunset and the wooded hills in the background were veiled in mist. An eagle hovered above the edge of a cliff, swooping

threateningly down from time to time toward two boys who were climbing the chalky height. In the foreground, standing on a great rock which projected into the lake, was a figure apparently of a boy. On closer inspection it proved to be a young girl clad in a fantastic costume. She wore a short skirt and blouse, with buckskin leggings, and on her hair, which covered her shoulders like a tawny mane, was a little velvet cap with a visor. She called across the lake to the boys in a voice clear as a bell, bidding them beware the mother eagle, whose angry screams echoed weirdly through the air. Then she descended the rock rapidly, carrying a rifle in her hand. Franz followed her unnoticed until they reached a camp on the hillside, where a guide was sitting by the fire making a Jack-o'-lantern, and a black woman with the queer misnomer of Minerva was preparing the evening meal. The girl pulled off her cap as she drew near to them, and Franz was filled with amazement to see reflected in her features the face of his dead cousin, Prasseda von Arnim. She went into the tent, and he approached the guide,

who was surly and uncommunicative at first. He relaxed, however, when he found the stranger meant no harm to his charge, and told him that her name was Prassedä von Arnim. He had a quaint patois, and told the story with pathos. Some years before her mother had died in that very camp. They brought her there hoping the piney woods would benefit her, but old Max shook his head thoughtfully as he added:

“She went the long road, too, sir. We could do nothing to help her. Poor, pretty Miss Seda was left to face the world alone. She hain’t got no friends but ’Nervy and me. All last winter she lived in the little village of S——, teaching in the school-house, but this summer her mother’s memory sorter took hold on her, and nothin’ would do but she mus’ come back again to the old camp for a spell. And here she is, and here we are with her. But it can’t las’ long, sir, with a pretty thing like her. She will go out into the world and leave us, I s’pose, and we can’t complain. She’s young and like a young doe. She can clim’! Lor’! how she can clim’! A doe ain’t nothin’ to her,”

At this juncture the girl appeared. He introduced himself and apologized for his intrusion, but the similarity of the names and her wonderful resemblance to a member of his family led him to suppose that they might be related. She received him coldly. Her father, Ulrich von Arnim, had long been dead. He was killed in the battle of Antietam. She had always understood that he had relatives in Germany, but they had never lifted a finger to help his wife and child. She was bitter in her denunciation of her grandfather, and would hardly listen when Franz explained that they had no knowledge of her existence. Then she amazed him by stating that her mother had written to Ulrich's father four years before, giving him proof of her rights. The letter was never answered, her grandfather persistently ignoring their appeal.

"I have no relatives," she cried, with flashing eyes. "They left my mother to die in poverty. What did they care for us? We were aliens, not of their caste, but we were born in America, where no caste is recognized, and consider ourselves the equal of kings."

Franz bowed before her wrath. What could he say? Could Uncle Heinrich really have been so hard?

"And would this not prove, my credulous friends, the story at least remarkable?" interrupted a woman's soft voice.

In the doorway stood Hulda, leaning against the trellis vine, and toying with a bunch of roses. Paul turned his head quickly; he had been following the narrative with intense interest and had not noticed her approach. Her words jarred on him. The child's face had been so true. Franz started to his feet and advanced with extended hands.

"Hulda!" he exclaimed.

"*Soyez le bienvenu*," she returned, seating herself by his side at the table and beginning to arrange the flowers. From among them she selected a half-open bud and pinned it to the lapel of his coat. She drew back and surveyed it critically, with her head slightly on one side, as if her mind were entirely engrossed in a serious occupation.

"There! Isn't that pretty?"

She looked up coquettishly into his face.

Her eyes were limpid and clear. They moved him strangely. How many times in past years had he met her challenging glance and felt the keen satire of her tongue. Once he had ventured to express his admiration. She had laughed, a sweet, ringing laugh which hurt him. He had not forgotten the pain.

"So you have come home again. Did you bring the little savage with you, and does she still wear her leggins and her tawny mane?"

He could not bear her jesting tone.

"Don't, Hulda."

"Is it such a serious matter already?" she rejoined, assuming a gravity befitting the occasion. "Well, tell me about her. Is she pretty?"

This Franz found difficult to answer.

"Beautiful," replied Paul drily.

Hulda flushed.

"What was her mother?"

"A singer in the South. After the war she went North and died ultimately; Prassedá says, of a broken heart,—killed by Uncle Heinrich's injustice."

"Poor woman. What a pity she had not had some of my philosophy."

Paul rose from his chair and walked slowly up and down the room.

"I had great difficulty in persuading Praseda to return with me," continued Franz. "She had some foolish idea about earning her own living as her mother had done. She was utterly alone, without home or money, and no friends but us, who are her natural guardians. I told her how desolate her grandfather was since his daughter's death, but she was hard as adamant against him, a feeling evidently inherited from her mother. After much persuasion she consented to come here. I was sure of a warm welcome for her at Felsenstein."

"That was right," responded Paul with more feeling than he was wont to show. "We shall take care of her and prove her rights yet."

Hulda smiled, while her heart was bitter with anger at his interference. He was her enemy. Franz she could control, but this man, who had never given her credit for a good impulse, who opposed her even in trifles and sneered at her, he was her true opponent,

"It seems strange that her mother should have appealed to Uncle Heinrich in vain if she was really Ulrich's wife," she said musingly.

She was busily engaged in tying a ribbon round the stems of her roses.

"I wonder why he didn't receive her eagerly. You know he never liked Friedrich any too well."

No answer to these queries. The men both looked at her, the one suspiciously, the other questioningly.

"Of course the girl gave you proof of the story—some letter, picture, or perhaps a copy of those papers sent to Carlshöhe. A marriage certificate, was it not, you said."

Franz shook his head, and Paul smiled from under his white moustache significantly.

"They had no copies. Culpable negligence," replied Franz impatiently. "Who but a woman would have been guilty of such stupidity?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Russian, pulling out the end of her ribbon and surveying the bunch of roses with satisfaction at the effect, "I shall wear that with my white lace gown to-night."

"What do you think, Hulda?" asked Franz, drawing his heavy brows into a frown.

"What do I think? That the silence is ominous."

"Uncle Heinrich's?"

"Of course. You are a dear chivalrous boy. You find a charming cousin on a mountain peak, and seek to rescue her from distress. You bring her here, and then you are in a quandary."

"There is no doubt but that she is Ulrich's child," he replied seriously.

"And you could hardly let her be a charge upon the parish for his sake. Of course not."

She turned to the window and motioned to Anna, who was walking in the garden with her pet poodle, an animal of mature years and little grace, whom Hulda in derision had named Duška (little soul).

"Why don't you consult Anna? She will advise you."

"Will you be serious?" replied Franz, bringing his hand down on to the table with sudden force.

Her manner exasperated him beyond en-

duration. She cast an angry glance at him. Really, his actions had well earned him the title of "the bear." It would be trying when she became his wife, but he would have to control his impulses then.

"If you wish my opinion," she said, with a calmness that contrasted with his vehemence, "I will give it to you. I should not advise you to confront the Count with a scandal which he has chosen to ignore. Think of the Arnim pride; think of the old women gossips in Mecklenburg. Rather let the memory of his only son rest untarnished. He died a soldier's death; think well before you stain his name with common scandal. His father's anger might be unpleasant to witness. Four years have passed since the papers are alleged to have been sent. He would not have left his son's child unnoticed had he received them. You will do whatever seems best, but I do not envy you an interview with that terrible old man at Carlshöhe."

She took up her lace scarf, and arranged it gracefully on her head before the glass; then, picking up the flowers, she left the room with

deliberate step, and they heard the tip-tap of her heels on the stone staircase outside.

Franz looked at Paul in silence. Her words had evidently impressed him ; there was a cloud on his brow, and for the first time he doubted his own judgment. A satirical smile spread over Paul's face as he noticed the change.

"Well, what do you think?" questioned his companion, as he observed it.

"I was trying to remember," he answered quietly, "how long it is since our charming would-be adviser was a visitor at Schloss Carls-höhe in Mecklenburg."

CHAPTER VI.

PRASSEDA stood by the window looking out into the paved courtyard. The branches of the great oak swept against the little panes of glass and screened her from the sun. It was all like a fairy tale: the journey across the ocean, the rapid travelling over foreign countries where strange languages were spoken,—all passed like a panorama before her eyes.

Although scarcely more than a child in years she was matured in bitter experience. Her idolized mother had left her at that age when the daughter had most need of her fostering care. She had lost courage at last, and sunk beneath a weight of sorrow that overburdened her. The last years of her life were spent in a little town among the Adirondacks, and when her strength failed they had taken her into the piney woods, to die. It was at her own request, for she loved those picturesque

shores, which were said to be so like the Königsee of her husband's native land. Her death had been peaceful. She would have been glad to die had it not been for her daughter.

Prassedá had educated herself mostly by reading books as she could get them. Accordingly her knowledge was varied. German she had almost mastered, because it was her father's language. Her mother spoke it fluently, and taught her child to lisp it even with her baby tongue. She was impulsive and emotional, but her nature was held in check by a shyness which gave one the impression of reserve. This stood her in good stead among the formal society into which she was suddenly thrown. She was direct in speech, and rarely prevaricated. Politeness with her came from the heart. Rather than wound by speaking the direct truth, she would evade a question with a skill worthy of a duenna of the Saxon Court.

Her intuitions were quick and her sympathy easily moved. She had insisted in bringing old Minerva with her, despite Franz's entreaties, for he foresaw no end of discomfort from this

impossible personage. Minerva had loved her mother, she said simply, and Minerva must come. So she did, but their journey had been a kind of a triumphal procession, attracting crowds which Prassedá seemed to take as a matter of course. The correct Franz suffered more than any one else, “’Nervy” being quite willing to show her yellow turban and white ivories to any one interested.

At last Prassedá found herself in the home of her father’s people. Felsenstein was like a fairy palace to her. She was quite unused to fine people and fine ways, being a veritable child of nature, who had been moulded to civilization by a well-bred mother.

She leaned back in her cushioned chair with a sigh. Minerva was unpacking the pretty things that Franz had bought in Paris on their way. A great wardrobe stood open to receive them; there were numerous wooden pegs in its spacious depths. The floor was polished and covered with rugs, and the furniture was stiff and conventional. Above an ungainly desk by the window hung the picture of a sad-eyed woman whose hair was combed

down on either cheek, lending to her gentle features an unnatural severity. She looked down in mild wonder at Prassedá's advent into this quiet household.

Adjoining was a little chamber with a small mahogany bed. Eider-down quilts and pillows were piled high upon it, and a small homespun rug lay on the floor. There was a white porcelain stove in the corner, and some engravings in black frames hung upon the walls. The only bit of color in the room was the red curtain at the window. Prassedá glanced around and returned to her sitting-room with a sigh. She began to feel a little homesick. Suddenly her eyes fell on a portière which she had not noticed before. It roused her curiosity. What could be behind it? She reached forward and pushed it aside, disclosing an open door leading to an adjoining apartment, which was in great contrast to the conventionality of her own. Everything was in confusion. The prim order that distinguished her rooms was lacking. The sunlight fell through the open casement onto a great bearskin spread before the door.

The eyes of the stuffed head gleamed at her with lurid light. The bed was covered with a silken quilt; the canopy was of satin and lace. Some one lived here! the place was stamped with her personality. Yonder was a cabinet of rare china brought from Russia. A velvet rug was thrown carelessly over the *chaise longue* to lend it an air of luxury. Before the half-opened wardrobe door lay a morning dress of some silken material that had slipped from its peg to the floor.

Prassedá peered curiously about, touched the silver toilet articles on the dressing-table with a certain awe, and looked into the polished dressing-mirror, wondering whether she saw her own reflection in its *repoussé* frame or that of some fairy sprite that had trespassed.

Suddenly her face changed, a pink color tinged her cheek, her eyes fell in confusion, for, standing in the doorway leading to the hall, was the woman whom she had seen sleeping in the wood. A white Spanish veil was thrown over her head. From under her mull dress a pair of red high-heeled morocco shoes, with silver buckles, were visible. She paused on the

threshold in surprise at the intrusion, and a swift change of expression passed over her face.

Prassedá saw it and caught its meaning. "We are neighbors, Countess Hulda. Pardon my intrusion. The door was open and I entered. It was so pretty here that I lingered," she said naïvely.

Hulda threw aside her lace scarf, stretched herself on the *chaise longue*, placing her hands under her head so that the sleeves of her morning dress fell back and showed her round arms to the elbow.

"Never mind, child," she replied. "Come here and sit beside me."

Prassedá seated herself on a stool, and looked long and searchingly into Hulda's face.

She bore the scrutiny well.

"What do you think of me?" she asked, after a pause.

Prassedá colored.

"Ah! Arcadian simplicity. You should learn better to conceal your thoughts."

Prassedá rose to her feet.

"And yet Franz said—"

"Place not the slightest faith in what men say."

"Perhaps you are right."

"Indeed! Mademoiselle Wisdom. Do not look at me with such large eyes, but tell me what our august cousin said."

"He said," responded Prassedá slowly, "that you would be my friend."

Hulda followed the course of a fly on the ceiling.

"How much perception he has, our good Franz! And when did he make these confidences?"

"When we were crossing the ocean, and look at the phosphorescent light in the evening, he drew pictures of Felsenstein, and told me how happy I should be here. He was so good to me. You know I never had traveled before."

"The situation must have been a novel one. You have arrived—"

"Yes, but—"

"There is a but. Every one bids you welcome. Does the Schloss not please you, or is it that I have failed to meet your expectations?"

"Oh, no! You are beautiful and clever; but," she added with hesitation, "you are not my friend."

Hulda opened her eyes in mild surprise.

"Not your friend?" she repeated. "What a strange idea!"

She rose from her recumbent position and approached the window.

"You forget," she said, in a changed tone, "that your American ways are different from ours. What Franz has promised for me I shall fulfil, but I am not sudden in my friendships. Perhaps you expected too much."

"Perhaps I did."

"Don't be fanciful, Prasseda," said Hulda in a more kindly tone, passing her arm carelessly around the young girl's waist. "We shall doubtless be excellent friends."

Her manner had changed perceptibly, for the child's words had put her on her guard.

"Go now and dress. You must be tired after your journey. You will have so much to tell me about that wild country of yours, and I shall make an excellent listener."

She kissed her lightly on both cheeks, and

lifted the portière separating the apartments. Prasseda passed into her own room, and it fell behind her.

“Fo’ de Lord, honey!” exclaimed the astonished Minerva, “where did you find such a beautiful lady?”

She pushed back the curtains and tried to peep in, but the door behind it was doubly locked against all intruders.

CHAPTER VII.

EGON made his way over the fields blindly, Hulda's mocking tone still ringing in his ears. It was not that she had dashed his hopes to the earth, he might have expected that; but the cruelty of her manner, the hard, uncompromising way in which she had forced the truth on him without reserve. Why did she not leave him a shred of faith? Why had she been so relentless in tearing the veil from his eyes? The Hulda he had known was worse than dead, she had never existed. His beautiful Hulda was but a shell without a soul, her smiles but tricks to play upon credulous humanity. Had he really been so duped? The dream was over, and although the awakening had been rude, it had been thorough.

He had given her his best love. Why had she cast him off so unkindly? Her words were not the result of misunderstanding; on the contrary, they had an unmistakable ring of

truth. For once she had been frank. Then let him accept them; let him forget that he had ever loved her. He was no longer a foolish boy living idle dreams, but a man with a future in which women had no part. She should find that he was made of stronger stuff. He would give scorn for scorn.

So occupied had he been with his thoughts that he had wandered far from the high-road. It was getting towards noon. The sun was high in the heavens. Near-by a rivulet bubbled and sparkled, and the birds sang merrily in the branches overhead. He laved his face in the refreshing water and stretched himself under the shade of a tree on the bank.

They would be breakfasting at Felsenstein then.

His groom and horse must have arrived long ago. What would Anna say when he failed to appear, and how would Hulda explain it?—by some clever ruse doubtless, he thought bitterly.

What had changed her so? She had been in a different mood when she wrote that letter. Then his mind reverted to Paris and his strange experience there. If he had followed his

impulse and arrived the previous night, perhaps she might have welcomed him more warmly.

No; he remembered with a shudder, his fate might have been similar to poor Gordon's. The hand had saved him.

Would she have treated him so harshly? What manner of woman was concealed behind that white veil? or had he really dreamed?

He looked up at the sky through the branches of the trees, and seemed to see the hand, with its glittering bauble, beckoning. Then it pointed towards Felsenstein as if to bid him retrace his steps. He looked again, but it was only a green twig on which sat a tiny robin.

From the bank where he lay the woodland path by which he had come from Felsenstein was visible. Horsemen were approaching; he could hear their voices.

Suddenly he started to his feet. Now all was clear. Franz had returned, and Hulda's conduct was explained. He took up his cap and began to retrace his steps towards Felsenstein.

* * * * *

Anna was sitting by the lake knitting a pair of socks for her brother Paul. She wore a large garden hat, tied under her chin with a broad black ribbon. At her feet reclined her wheezy poodle.

She had been conversing with him on various topics, but his attention had wandered. Tired with snapping at flies, he had fallen asleep in the sun. Hans, the old gardener, was at work among the roses. Suddenly Duška lifted his head and listened.

"There, my pet, be still," murmured Anna soothingly. "What has disturbed thy slumbers?"

A large black cat crossed the path lazily, but seeing her natural enemy so near at hand, she promptly bristled.

"Hans!" called Anna fretfully, "remove that monster. She is disturbing poor Duška's morning nap."

Hans stepped forward to obey his mistress's command, but the obnoxious tabby had already betaken himself to more congenial quarters. The dog opened one eye to make sure of his safety, then emitted a series of

valiant barks, which his mistress found difficult to quell.

"*Guten morgen, tantchen,*" said a cheery voice behind her. She looked over her shoulder and saw Egon standing leaning against a tree.

"Poor Duška," he added laughingly, "he is having a hard time of it. Well, how are you all at Felsenstein?"

"How you startled me! So you have come back, too. This morning is full of surprises. Have you seen her?" she asked eagerly.

Egon sat down on the bench, and picked up her ball of yarn. He wondered what Hulda had said.

"You must have met her on the way over the fields," continued the old lady impressively. "I wonder what you will think of her."

Egon was silent. He began to feel embarrassed.

"Don't hesitate to tell me the truth, Egon, for I depend upon you, my dear boy, to give me a disinterested opinion. As for poor Paul,—*du lieber Gott!* he has lost his senses. Franz—well—I have nothing more to say about him."

"The least said the better!" interrupted Egon, rising abruptly. "Yes, I have seen her, and I know all. Of course it will be a good thing for everybody."

"Do you think so?" returned Anna in surprise. "I thought you would have some sense. But it's always so. A man is so easily influenced by a pretty face."

"Yes, since the beginning of time, Aunt Anna," answered Egon bitterly, and he threw her ball of yarn down impatiently.

"Egon, what are you doing? My beautiful yarn, for which I had to send to Dresden expressly!"

Egon was already groping in the grass to find the ball, which in his impetuosity he had thrown away. He brought it back a soggy mass from the lake, where it had fallen, and promised to replace it tenfold the next day.

"So you are satisfied," she said, eagerly returning to the subject of her gossip. "I am not so sure. Last night I dreamed of a cat with green eyes. It was a bad omen; and when Hans came to us and said a black woman was sitting on the box, I could not help thinking of

my dream, and felt sure that disaster had befallen us."

"Aunt Anna!" exclaimed Egon, "are you quite insane? What are you talking about?"

"Why, the maid, of course. Any child would have understood that."

"Whose maid?"

The old lady stared at him in speechless indignation.

"Didn't you just tell me that you had seen her walking in the fields, and that her coming was a good thing for everybody? Now you pretend not to understand me. Everybody conspires to vex me to-day," she whimpered. "Nobody understands me but Duška. Come here, my pet."

She embraced the dog effusively, but for once her darling did not reciprocate her tenderness, being awakened rudely from a dreamless sleep.

Anna disappeared toward the house with an aggrieved air, leaving Egon to ponder over her words. In the march of recent events he had entirely forgotten Prassedá, and he gave up the solution of Anna's conduct as hopeless. He raised his eyes to the grim Schloss, which

towered before him. The windows were closed against the sun. The roses seemed to droop in its hot rays. The glass doors of the drawing-room were open on the balcony, and the steps leading to it were bordered with tropical plants.

A crisp step sounded on the gravel walk behind him. If Hulda came what should he say to her? In a moment it had passed, and a young girl came into view. She paused at the steps and bent over a rose-bush. Her face was hidden beneath a broad, red hat, trimmed with ostrich feathers. Judging from the grace of her figure, she must be pretty. Doubtless she was a stranger visiting at the Schloss. He had not been told that there were visitors. He did not feel in the mood for new people. Suddenly she uttered a little cry of pain, and the dress which had been gathered together in her hand fell, with a great bunch of wild-flowers, to the ground. Egon advanced quickly, and stooping picked them up.

"Are you hurt, *gnädiges Fräulein*?" he asked.

"It is nothing," she answered shyly. "A

thorn pricked my finger. It was a penalty for robbing the bush, I suppose."

He saw at once by her accent that she was a foreigner, and yet it never occurred to him to guess who she was.

She looked up to thank him for the flowers, when her eyes darkened with surprise.

Had this tall soldier already made an impression on her child heart?

"Are you one of my cousins too?" she questioned, still looking at him in wonder.

"I am Egon von Arnim, at your service," he replied, bowing low. "And you?"

"Oh! I am Prassedä," she replied; "I thought you would know."

"I should have known," returned Egon, vexed with himself for his awkwardness; "I should have guessed."

"I am not surprised," retorted his cousin archly. "You know so little of Americans here. Why, Baroness Kempen thought I was black like Minerva, and you doubtless thought me a savage, too."

"You dazzled me, fair cousin," quoth Egon with an attempt at gallantry.

“Nay, cousin,” she replied, “that were impossible.”

And she left him, doubtful as to whether her words were the essence of simplicity or of coquetry.

The latter, he thought cynically, for at that time he was doubtful even of his own sincerity.

CHAPTER -VIII.

SEVERAL days passed without any unusual event to mark their progress. Egon had a spirited interview with his brother, and blamed himself for his shortcomings so frankly that Franz had not the heart to be severe, and paid his debts forthwith. Then Egon surprised him by asking minute questions about life in America and the chances of making a fortune there. Franz laughed. Egon was not apt to show much interest in foreign countries.

"I have sometimes fancied I should like America," he said, reflectively.

"Nonsense!" replied his brother. "Stick to your spurs, my dear boy, and before long you will be a colonel. There's more money lost than made in that adventurous country. Sharp wits are required, which you have not."

Paul was present during this interview.

"If you would like to go to America," he

said afterwards to Egon, noting the restless expression in his eyes with anxiety—the boy had always been his favorite, and he wondered what troubled him—“wait a little, and I may have a commission for you.”

Egon wondered vaguely what this commission might be.

Egon had seen little of the inmates of Felsenstein since Prasseda's arrival. He had caught sight of his American cousin once or twice on the river rowing, but she shot out of sight when he drew near, as if seeking to avoid him. He expected to be ordered to the castle during the *Manœuvres*, which were near at hand, although the idea of being in the same house with Hulda and witnessing Franz's wooing was unbearable. For the first time the sense of obligation to his brother galled him. Promotion in the army was slow and tedious. Franz had made his way without assistance; why should he not do equally well, if he exerted himself? He was standing on the bank of the river lost in these thoughts. He chafed against restraint and longed for action. What if he had seized the hand that night in Paris, and

looked behind the veil? Would she, too, have left him, as Hulda had done? The wind stirred the rushes on the shore, and he looked up to meet a pair of clear eyes which were fixed on him in wistful inquiry. Their understanding was startling.

“Prassedá!”

“What troubles you?” her eyes seemed to ask.

“You came upon me so suddenly,” he stammered.

“I was waiting. My boat lies at your feet. You were in the path, and I did not wish to disturb you.”

Egon looked down at the white skiff lying half-hidden among the grasses, and drew it in.

“Come, cousin, let me row you,” he said, holding out his hand. “I feel energetic this morning.”

She stepped lightly in and seated herself in the stern.

“You shall tell me tales about Felsenstein,” she answered, “while I steer.”

“Tales about Felsenstein!” he repeated, taking up the oars and pushing out into the

stream. "Tell me rather of your life in that wonder-land, America."

"I can tell you of the woods, of camp life, and my quiet winters in a country town, but the busy whirl of which one reads, America as you know it, is a sealed book to me, while the woods are alike the world over."

"And yet you are essentially American."

"I am what my mother made me," replied Prassedá, simply; "she was my world."

The tears came into her eyes.

"Tell me about Felsenstein," she persisted.

"About its traditions or its people?"

"One must talk about people every day, but floating down this dreamy stream I would rather listen to fairy tales."

"Felsenstein legends are commonplace. They would not amuse you. I will tell you a story, Prassedá, if you will listen."

"I am listening."

The boat drifted by a bed of water-lilies, and she stretched out her hand to gather one.

"Why do you always wear those long tan gloves? They baffle one."

"They are new to me, cousin. I wear

them as a child plays with a new toy. They came from Paris."

"They look so fine."

"Being fine is a novel sensation to me."

"Take them off and show me your hand. My story is about a hand."

She glanced archly up at him from under the brim of her red hat.

"Tell me the story first; for if the hand was beautiful, mine might suffer by comparison."

"It was suggestive, not beautiful," he answered, musingly. "I saw it first in a carriage window in Paris."

"Ah! this is interesting," she responded with a sigh of contentment. "Go on."

He looked into her eager face. Surely, she was fair and true. Above all, her candor impressed him. Once he had believed in Hulda. But now!

"The woman was hidden from view. I could only fancy what she might be from her hand. Ah! I should know it anywhere—that slender hand with its glistening emerald ring. It was a peculiar ring—a snake set in emeralds and diamonds. It seemed to draw me away

in spite of myself. The carriage was standing in the Place de la Madeleine. I moved towards it, but the coachman drove away. Just then a man who had been climbing a ladder over my head fell on the spot where I had been standing, and was instantly killed. The hand had saved my life."

Prassedá hid her face in horror.

"Did you see it again?" she asked presently.

"Yes, once afterwards when I was standing on the balcony of my hotel ready to take the night train for Berlin. A bunch of roses lay on the railing near my window, and the hand was extended to take them. I saw a shadowy figure behind the lattice. The hand was near my own. It had saved my life, and I felt an impulse to press it for the service, but I drew back."

"You were sure of its identity?"

"Quite—the ring was still upon her finger. When my reason reasserted itself I found that the train had left without me."

"And were you annoyed?" questioned his cousin.

"The train was wrecked. Again the hand

had saved me. Many lives were lost. Perhaps I, too, might have been among them. Although I am not superstitious, I can't help fancying that this mysterious hand is closely linked with my life. Recently, as I lay by the bank of this stream, not far from here, I fancied I saw it again."

"Not here, surely," said Prassedá. "How could that be?"

"It was only fancy. Still I am not surprised at anything. If I should see it, I should be inclined to regard its coming as a warning against disaster, and obey its bidding blindly."

Prassedá steered under the shadow of an overhanging willow, and drew the boat up close to the bank.

"Is that all your story?" she said.

Her voice had lost its eagerness. She seemed almost indifferent.

"I might tell of fancies I have had. But why. They are foolish. Better, doubtless, for me that I should never see her face, for the result would be disappointment. There is so little truth in woman."

"Do you really think that, Cousin Egon?" remarked the young girl wistfully.

"The truer a woman looks the falser she will prove," replied her cousin in a bitter tone.

Prassedá stood up in the stern and caught hold of a branch of the willow.

"Have you lost faith in yourself?" she asked.

"I cannot tell."

"Only when you believe yourself incapable of truth may you be justified in doubting the world."

"That is harsh."

"Is it not harsher to doubt mankind because the individual fails? If your faith is betrayed blame your error in trusting an unworthy nature."

"Who taught you so much wisdom?"

"The birds, the air, and the sunshine," answered the young girl, laughing merrily, as she leaped ashore, and pushed back the boat into the stream.

"You desert me; that is unfair."

"I leave you to your sinister thoughts, my cousin," she called back from among the over-

hanging branches, "thanking you at the same time for much pleasure. Good-bye."

He heard her merry voice singing as she went along the path:

"What care I how fair she be,
If she be not fair to me."

Was she laughing at him? He was puzzled by this strange transition from sadness to gaiety, from the seriousness of the philosopher to the ingenuousness of a child. There seemed no trace of coquetry in her bearing. She had looked at him with sympathy, and drawn out his inmost thoughts, then springing ashore she had left him like a woodland sprite. She piqued him.

As the boat drifted down the stream he saw Hulda standing on the bank. There was a smile of irony hovering around her mouth. "Good-morning, Egon!" she called. "Felsenstein knows you no more. Have I driven you away?"

"Was that your object?" he answered.

"After all, clandestine meetings have their charm," she remarked, and went on her way.

He clenched his hand, and the cords rose on his brow. Hulda had left a sting behind. However, a morning with his cousin need not cause scandal. She had followed simply the dictates of her heart, in rowing up the stream with him. The blame was his for asking her. If Hulda should attempt to entangle the innocent child in her net, it would become his duty to protect her.

CHAPTER IX.

PRASSED A tripped through the woods smiling. Very different had the morning been from those when Max's stalwart arm propelled their skiff across the lake. The gulf between the old life and the new seemed very wide.

It was more amusing to chat with a gay cavalier than to listen to Max's old stories. What caused the difference? Was it the language? That sweet familiar *du* fell caressingly from his lips, although he was only her Cousin Egon. She could see him leaning back in the bow with the sunlight on his blond head. That slight red mark across his brow was caused by the cruel sword of a loyal *Kamerad*. Egon was proud of it. It was a mark of honor. She shuddered. The barbaric customs of these civilized people perplexed her. It was a pretty story that he had told her. She laughed low to herself, and pulling off her

gloves held her hands high above her head in the sunlight. Suddenly she grew serious. Perhaps they might have suffered by comparison. It was well she had kept them hidden. Poor Egon! to have such strange fancies, and he looked so strong and fearless. But he could be led by fingers rounded like her own.

She drew her gloves on again and fastened the buttons resolutely. A little frown ruffled her straight brows. She should wear them always in his presence. He must have no more fancies. The birds sang wildly in the swaying trees. How good it was to live and rejoice in the sunshine! Wood-flowers peeped up among the ferns, the moss yielded to her feet.

She stopped all at once and looked up the stream. What made her so happy? Her native mountains were more beautiful than these woods of Felsenstein, the people equally kind to her in their rough way. Why did she feel no regret for these old friends?

At a bend in the stream the boat came skimming towards her. A wave of color swept over her face. He had eyes like Max, loyal and true. She could see him through the thick

leaves pulling vigorously, the muscles standing out like cords upon his arms.

Perhaps it was because he had Max's eyes that she felt as though she had known him all her life.

Who had made him doubt the world? It was wicked! It was unfair to doubt all women because one had failed.

Hulda reached the garden before Prasseda. She found Anna and Franz engaged in earnest conversation, which ceased when she drew near.

He looked up eagerly at the sound of her footsteps; an expression of disappointment passed over his face. He was expecting Prasseda. Had she seen her? Hulda answered with an assumption of carelessness that she was returning home through the wood. Without saying another word he rose and went up the path. There was something new in his face, a strange preoccupied look which she had never seen before. For the first time a doubt entered her mind. Anna looked up from her knitting, and noticed that she too had seen the change in Franz. Truly Hulda, who had had

one husband, and might have had a dozen if she had chosen, should be able to read men. Did she think with Paul that Franz was in love with Prassedá?

Hulda turned pale at the suddenness of the blow.

"In love with Prassedá!" she ejaculated.

"Don't repeat my words in that unpleasant manner. You will wake Duška. What with the black cat that haunts the garden in the morning, and the loud talking since the American came, he rarely gets his full nap, and the darling needs it."

Was the prize for which Hulda had schemed really slipping away from her? While she had been living in cloudland Franz had grown cold. It was not too late to reclaim him.

They were coming across the grass together. His eyes dwelt upon Prassedá with an interest impossible to mistake. He in jest reproached her for some fault, and she laughed mischievously.

"There she comes," said Anna, with an expressive nod. "What did I tell you?"

A malicious thought entered Hulda's mind.

"Prassedda has been rowing on the river with Egon," she said.

"Has he been here?"

"Not for a week."

"Humph!" ejaculated Anna.

Where had Prassedda met the gay young soldier. It looked clandestine, and these Americans had such strange manners. One never knew what they might not be capable of. An Arnim, too! She must not be allowed to disgrace herself.

She received the delinquent with a judicial air, which Prassedda felt but did not understand. She had been rowing on the river with Egon. Was there any harm?

No *harm* certainly, although her judge looked as though a crime had been committed; but German girls usually found it embarrassing to be alone with men. Had they not found the situation peculiar? On the contrary it seemed quite natural. She flushed at the implied rebuke, and answered with a little defiant toss of her head, that American men were to be trusted. Perhaps Egon might not be flattered by Aunt Anna's insinuation.

But her pleasure was spoiled. Could he have thought her bold? She had been too happy. It was always so.

Afterwards Franz suggested angrily that Prassedá's education should be left to him, for they would only make his charge unhappy. Then Anna rose majestically and left them. Her sensitive nature could not bear reproach, and men were so ungrateful.

Hulda looked up at Franz inquiringly. She was determined to learn how far matters had gone between him and this American girl. He did not heed her when she spoke to him. His glance wandered out on the lake; he was preoccupied. There was a tender light in his eyes, but it was not for her. She was simply his brother's widow and his sister.

"I wish to ask your advice?"

Her heart sank. A man does not preface a love declaration by a request for advice. She knew what was coming.

"Women understand other women so much better than men."

"I don't agree with your theory, Franz. Shall we discuss it?"

But he ignored her efforts to turn him from the subject.

“Hulda, I wish to marry Prassedá.”

It was out now. There was no help for it.

“Do you think she would be happy with me. I am more than twice her age.”

An impatient answer rose to her lips, but she controlled her impulse and was silent.

“I have been thinking over what you said about speaking to Uncle Heinrich. Perhaps you were right. For if the papers never were received, there might be trouble. The poor child is not to blame for being thrown upon the world by mischance. I owed Ulrich a debt I could never repay, and she is his daughter. She has every right to Carlshöhe. It would be the only way by which I could give her back her inheritance.”

“Do you not love her then?”

“Yes, I love her,” he answered; “I feel a great sympathy for her. I would do anything to make her happy,—but she might accept me through a mistaken sense of gratitude. I wish to avoid that. *I must.*”

“Why not wait until after you return from

Carlshöhe," interrupted Hulda. His impassioned tone jarred on her ear. "There is a possibility that those papers did reach Uncle Heinrich, in which case your pity would be wasted." There was an imperceptible sneer in her tone. "As heiress of Carlshöhe, she might regard your suit differently."

"True," he answered thoughtfully, "I am going next week to Carlshöhe on affairs connected with the estate. Oh, Hulda, you think me an old fool! I see it in your face."

She strove to smile.

"A man in love is an irrational being. If I should tell you what I think of this quixotic plan, you would not listen."

She made light of the subject, and he was not displeased.

"I have implicit faith in your judgment," he answered, emphatically.

"Then bide your time, *mon cher*," she replied. "Do nothing rashly. Woman's heart is like a fluttering bird, easily snared, but often frightened by too sudden a wooing."

"And yet," he whispered passionately, "I

think thou wouldst be wooed like the tigress by sudden mastery."

She recoiled from him. Whence came this change? He held her hand tenderly in his great palm. One movement, and he could crush it. His eyes gazing at her from under his heavy brows were filled with strange light. He loved her, not Prassedá, but his awkward form filled her with repulsion. Should she ever conquer it?

She laughed lightly and withdrew her hand.

Many times had it happened before. When the moment came for her to seize and hold him, her strength left her. She could not bear his touch.

His impulse had been momentary. Her laugh dispelled it. He knew that his feeling for Prassedá was purer, but the long-limbed, graceful Russian had bewitched him. He loved the perfume of her hair. Her magnetic touch thrilled him. But she, with her fine intellect and dainty personality, would never think of him. His face was pale from the vehemence of his emotion. He had regained his self-control. Prassedá, the pure-hearted child of his

cousin Ulrich, was to be his wife. It was so ordered by Fate. He must conquer his passion for Hulda.

She sat under the elm until the sun was high in the heavens, thinking of her interview with Franz. Her head ached, her throat was parched, but she did not despair of ultimate victory. Regret was vain. She saw too late her mistake in allowing him to wander from her. He would not yield lightly, for he had a strong will and great resolution when once roused. His love for her was as strong as ever, but he had renounced her, finally. Formerly his pride had held him back. She called him her good bear and discouraged him; now all her devices would not bring him to her feet, for honor was at stake. She had given seeming acquiescence to his plan of marrying Prassedda to gain time, but she must thwart it by subtle means.

She knew quite well that Prassedda had met Egon that morning by accident on the river; however, it suited her purpose to give coloring to this meeting. Why not profit by it? That would be a simple way out of the difficulty.

Egon's heart might be caught on the rebound. The girl was attractive. This she must admit. Could she bear it? Now that he despised her she loved him more than ever. She had thrown him over deliberately, but she could not control her heart, and the thought of his loving Prasseda filled her with maddening jealousy. She might be capable of a desperate deed to frustrate the very marriage which she had planned.

Franz loved the boy. He had a generous nature. He would leave Prasseda free to choose him if he thought they loved each other. He would even settle a fortune on them both, if she only managed the affair with tact. And should she lose the game for lack of clever scheming after sacrificing so much? No—she would be firm. Egon should marry Prasseda.

They were talking in the garden-room. Fragments of their conversation reached her ear. Paul was protesting with Franz against his delay in seeing the Count von Arnim. What if he should die ignorant of his grand-daughter's presence in Germany? At times Franz was stubborn; he could not

see the advisability of hurrying a visit already planned by his uncle for the following week. Hulda's opinion should not be disregarded, but crusty Paul did not seem to think much of her advice. Moreover, it was prejudiced.

"Prejudiced—nonsense! It is clear and disinterested. I cannot share your feeling about Hulda," answered Franz impatiently.

"I made a discovery recently, Franz," said Paul, "which proves beyond doubt that she was at Carlshöhe when that packet arrived from America."

Franz looked surprised, but preserved his dogged air. He was determined to hear nothing derogatory about his brother's widow.

Egon entered while they were talking, and seated himself by the window after shaking hands with the two men.

"Recently," continued Paul, "I remembered that Friedrich wrote me from Carlshöhe during his visit. I had sent the letter to Egon because it contained some reference to his affairs."

"And I have brought it with me as you requested, Paul," said Egon, taking the paper

from his pocket-book, and handing it to his brother.

Franz received it in silence.

"Well, what does it prove?" he asked, already on the defensive.

"The packet should have reached Carlshöhe towards the end of August, 18—. That letter was written on the last day of that month, in the same year. Read what it says." Here he took the letter back, and read from it the following extract: "'We have been here a month, and our visit has terminated unpleasantly. While I am writing these lines, Hulda's maid is packing. My wife has already gone to Rabenhorst, where I shall join her as soon as the luggage has left the house.'"

"I see no reference to anything but an unpleasant episode in poor Friedrich's career," said Franz shortly.

"They must have been at Carlshöhe when the American letters arrived."

"What then?"

"It simply justifies my idea that Hulda knows more than she chooses to tell."

Franz rose to his feet with an expression of

anger. He turned to Egon, but he seemed to support Paul's theory. He knew her better than either of them.

"Is this your only ground for suspicion?" he asked.

"The only ground you would consider legitimate," replied Paul.

"What a scene for a tragedy!" exclaimed Hulda's voice behind them. "What is the matter with you all?"

She sat down by the window, and waved a large fan back and forth lazily. The air was very warm. The attitude of repression between the men appeared not to impress her, for she opened her eyes and gazed at them in childlike wonder.

"Do I disturb a private conference?" she asked, glancing up coquettishly over her fan.

Franz approached her. She knew by his pallor that the scene had been connected with her in some way. She suspected it when she opened the door. He looked into her upturned face with anguish.

"Hulda, you were at Carlshöhe during August, 18—?"

"Very likely. It was so long ago I have forgotten."

"This letter from Friedrich was written at that time."

The paper fluttered into her lap and rested there. She did not touch it ; she hated anything that brought back her unsuccessful past, and his death had been a fatal blow to her ambition.

"You would naturally have heard of these letters if they had arrived during your visit?"

He questioned her evidently against his will. She looked up in surprise.

"Hardly! I was not in the Count's confidence."

"This news, Hulda," remarked Paul, fixing his piercing eyes on the Russian, "would have made a great difference to your husband, for Prassedá would have superseded him."

Hulda rose from her chair and passed before him.

"Really, I cannot see the reason for this discussion," she said, indifferently. "There is a simple way of solving the mystery. Go and ask the Count von Arnim. He can tell you the truth."

"You advise this?" asked Paul, while Franz looked at her in astonishment.

"Why, certainly. The sooner the better."

She lingered a moment by the window, and picked a rose from the bush outside.

"Egon, the next time you come over I wish to talk about arrangements for the masked ball which is to be given during the *Manœuvres*. Anna has left everything in my hands."

She stood on the threshold looking over her shoulder, in bold relief against the dark hall. Who could imagine that her conscience was not clear? She had forgotten the serious subject under discussion; her thoughts were occupied with preparations for a ball.

"Be sure and bring the handsomest officers in the garrison," she added, gayly, as she closed the door.

"Your suspicion is unmanly," said Franz, after a pause. "Hulda knows nothing."

"Fool!" muttered Paul to himself; "to be led by a woman, as fickle as the wind."

CHAPTER X.

HULDA preserved her calm while she walked through the hall where prying eyes might lurk, but once hidden in her room, behind a bolted door, she lost her self-possession. Her eyes dilated, her heart beat wildly with alarm. Could they know? Had those searching eyes of Paul discovered anything? No, that was impossible. She had held Franz back from this visit to Carlshöhe through sheer cowardice. He might have gone and returned none the wiser, unless perchance her secret should have been discovered.

Why had she not urged him to go in the first place, and allayed Paul's suspicions? If the Count had really found the papers, he would have turned the earth over to find this Prassedä, the daughter of his prodigal son. No; they were still hidden within the thick walls of the Schloss, where no casual search

could find them. She held her rival in her hand. Were it not for this heroic idea of Franz to reinstate her through marriage, she might still defy Prasseda.

Why had she not destroyed that packet at once instead of concealing it? Surely the fault had not been hers. How well she remembered the night when she had abstracted the mail from the locked bag on the library table. It was not an unusual occurrence, for she was engaged in a Russian correspondence which involved political schemes dangerous to her safety. Her husband was talking with his uncle on matters of business, and she expected important letters that night. It had not been difficult to force the old-fashioned lock. Her letters were not there, but among the newspapers she found a long sealed envelope addressed to the Count von Arnim, and bearing the American postmark. Apprehension seized her. Those angular characters in a woman's hand told the tale. Ulrich! She had always feared some folly on his part. What might not be the result? Perchance Friedrich's inheritance, for

which she had schemed so long, might be in forfeit. She must know the contents of this packet.

It was very still in the room. The great clock ticked like the beating of her heart while she hesitated. A door opened and shut at the end of the corridor. She could hear the sound of voices raised in angry dispute. Some one might come and find her with those papers in her hand. Quickly she slipped through the passage-way to her own apartments and locked the door behind her.

They had been Ulrich's once, and opened on the terrace overlooking the lake. Here was fishing-tackle hung up over the doors, and guns in a case which he had used before his father's temper drove him away from home. There were his books on some rude shelves, all exemplary books, although he was supposed to have radical tendencies over which he quarreled with his father. Even as a boy he had stolen forbidden books and hidden them away. The old housekeeper wearied Hulda with stories of the young master's boyhood, but they were told to deaf ears.

What was the dead young master to Hulda but an obstacle out of her way?

"It was rumored that he had a secret place in the wall," said the old woman one day, "where the dear boy, bless his heart, used to conceal his books and papers from his father's knowledge. Our old master was very curious sometimes, and was given to examining the Junker's rooms for evidence against him. He was a clever lad, he was! There was no catching him napping."

She chuckled to herself noiselessly.

Hulda turned pale. What if the old Graf should take it into his head to overlook their Russian correspondence! She questioned the servant carefully, but could learn nothing more; so she set herself to work, determined to find this convenient place of concealment unaided. Every saint's head in the wainscoting was tried in vain. For days the search seemed fruitless. At last, when she began to discredit the story as an old woman's tale, she touched by chance a piece of carved scroll-work near the floor, and a panel slid back as if impelled by a ghostly hand. Within was a recess where some dusty

books lay hidden, nothing very compromising to poor Ulrich's memory. He had evidently forgotten them there years ago. Afterwards she made a bonfire of these relics, and cleared the closet for her own use.

From time to time she placed her letters there, thus feeling secure against the Count's curiosity. Once she met him coming from her rooms. His trivial excuse did not deceive her, and she thanked Ulrich for his forethought in providing the receptacle for her protection. This evening, after taking refuge in her room, she drew the aggressive looking document from her pocket and hurriedly broke the seal. There were letters in Ulrich's hand ; a lock of hair, a photograph of a soldierly boy in uniform, whose identity it was easy to guess from its resemblance to Egon, two long thin papers tied together by a faded yellow ribbon, and a letter written in the same angular hand as the address.

This Hulda opened first. It set forth the fact that the writer was the lawful wife of Ulrich von Arnim, who had been killed in battle during the Civil War in America. Nothing but

fast approaching death could have forced the writer to ask aid of one who had been so cruel to his only son. But she could not die and leave her child and Ulrich's unprovided for. It was not right that she should be obliged to fight the world alone. Then followed a dignified and touching appeal to the Count for his grandchild. The mother reproached herself for her delay. Now that she was about to die, her pride was conquered. She begged him to answer her immediately, and relieve her anxiety before it was too late.

Enclosed were documents to prove the truth of her statements, but she seemed ignorant of the fact that Prasseda would be heiress to the large estates of Carlshöhe.

Hulda read this letter to the end. Every line was a menace to her security. What would be their future if Friedrich were supplanted?

She must burn these papers and scatter the ashes. America was far away; the woman ill and dying; perhaps the pain of waiting might kill her. Hulda crushed the papers in her hand, and prayed in her fury that this might be.

Several closely written love missives, sent evidently by Ulrich from the soldiers' camp, were among the papers. She could not read them. Their tale of love did not interest her.

Steps were echoing along the passage-way. Directly her husband would be there and discover all. He was not unscrupulous. It would not be safe to trust him.

A paper box lay on the table, and into it she thrust the tossed and crumpled letters, placing it quickly in the convenient hiding-place below the wainscoting. Little had poor Ulrich imagined what use his enemy would make of it when he found it years before.

She had barely closed the spring when her husband knocked loudly at the door and demanded admittance. His agitation was so great that he failed to notice her embarrassment. He had had the final rupture with his uncle, and commanded her to leave the Schloss forthwith, for he would remain no longer than was absolutely necessary under his uncle's inhospitable roof. The night was fine, the carriage was at the door. She must put on her wraps and drive to Rabenhorst, while her maid

would pack the trunks and follow. There was nothing for Hulda but to obey, and she consoled herself with the thought that her secrets could not have a better hiding-place than within the walls of Carlshöhe.

Not long after this Friedrich died.

She had never returned to Carlshöhe, and had almost forgotten the theft of the papers until Prassedá appeared at Felsenstein, but Friedrich's letter which Paul had read recalled the past. She could hear the clock ticking in the library at Carlshöhe, and see the carved saint's heads upon the walls of Ulrich's room.

Let Franz see his uncle ; he would deny the existence of these American letters. She was quite safe !

There was a sound of clattering hoofs in the courtyard below. A mounted messenger had just ridden under the window holding up a telegram. Something had happened ! Probably it involved some trivial matter concerning Paul, but in her heart she felt that a crisis was at hand. She hurried through the hall in breathless haste. When she reached the garden room he had already opened the dispatch.

There was a grave look on their faces that foreshadowed bad news.

"The old Count is hopelessly insane," explained Anna in answer to her questioning look.

She turned aside to hide her emotion.

"Schultz was called in consultation," said Paul gloomily. "He is rarely mistaken. We were at the university together."

She approached Franz with a look of sympathy. He was standing by the window somewhat apart from the others.

"I must speak to Prassedà without delay," he whispered.

"Wait until you return from Carlshöhe," she answered, laying a detaining hand on his arm.

Prassedà bade Franz good-bye with regret. She clung to him as her only friend, and expressed her gratitude for his kindness in terms that misled him; but he remembered Hulda's advice and was silent. Prassedà's cousin did not appreciate his anxiety for her welfare. The thought that her grandfather could be ignorant of her existence never entered her mind. She was impersonally sorry for his trouble. It was as if some stranger had been stricken down.

Franz went away cheerfully, feeling entire faith in Hulda's tact. Egon was coming with a dozen other officers to the Schloss for the *Einquartirung*. He was to bring his four horses, and had promised Prasseda many a gallop across the country, a prospect which thrilled her with delight and drove away serious thought.

That night, on going to bed, Hulda called the "Prinzessin," as she styled Prasseda, into her room and strove by skilful questioning to sound her heart. She would miss Franz doubtless. A fortnight slips away so soon, was the philosophical answer. What would her fair cousin do, if he never were to come back? Prasseda looked grave, but replied that she should earn her living by singing as her mother had done. Hulda was seated on the floor, and caressed the bear's head with her soft fingers. Her profile stood out like a silhouette against the red lamp which lighted Prasseda's upturned face. She could read each varying emotion in the girl's mobile features. Would she feel herself bound to mold her conduct entirely according to Franz's desire? Gratitude for his interest would incline her to regard his wishes. Cer-

tainly she would not oppose him unless principle were involved. She had placed herself in his hands for a given time, and considered him her guardian. The eyes of the bear-head glared at Prassedá menacingly, and Hulda, following her thoughts, told her that Egon had killed the animal in Russia some years before and sent it to her as a trophy.

The young girl lowered her eyes.

"He must be a good shot," she answered.

"He does most things well. He is an expert oarsman."

"Do you think so?" replied Prassedá, calmly. "I thought he rowed badly."

It seemed to Hulda that the young girl might be laughing at her.

There was no evidence of embarrassment in Prassedá's manner. She seemed entirely unconscious. Instinct prevented her from showing her heart to the woman whom she mistrusted from the first.

Afterwards Hulda felt a sensation of being baffled; but she must control her opponent or all would be lost. She had heard Egon ask Prassedá to ride with him next day, and had

promised to lend her a habit, as they were about the same height and figure. She must be a fearless rider.

Alone with Egon! How her heart revolted at the thought, and she prayed that a storm might arise in the night and upset their plans. She had felt the pangs of jealousy when she had seen them floating down the river in friendly converse. The idea of seeing herself dethroned in his heart was bitter.

The sky was cloudless next day when Prassedá arose. The meek-faced picture on the wall smiled encouragingly, as Minerva fastened her habit with quaint complimentary remarks at her appearance. She saw Egon waiting under the oak. He bade her hasten, for the day was fair.

Hardly had she sprung into the saddle than they were joined by a funny looking old gentleman on a cob, whom Anna introduced as "our good Herr Medicinalrath Schmidt." He would go part way with them, and she bade them moderate their pace to his. Egon muttered an exclamation far from complimentary to the "good Herr Medicinalrath," and

glancing up, saw Hulda's face peeping out of the casement among the leaves of the oak. She wished to mar his pleasure. It was her influence at work.

Herr Schmidt's espionage did not last long, for his sober cob could not keep pace with Egon's spirited horses, so he urged him to give them rein.

Oh, that chase across field and dale! Was there ever anything like it in Prassedá's experience? She paused breathless in a woodland road, and asked Egon to give her water from the brook near-by.

As he bent to fill his cup, he observed that they were standing on the spot where he had lingered on the day that he parted from Hulda. It seemed years ago. To-day his heart was light. He could laugh with joy at the sunshine. Prassedá had taken off her hat, and her hair came down and fell in masses below her waist; her cheek was flushed and her eyes burned with fire. For the first time Egon was impressed by her beauty.

"Cousin," said she, handing him back the cup, "are you a pessimist to-day?"

"I am a dreamer."

"That is more amusing. That tree looks as if a woodland sprite might dwell within it."

"Perhaps there is one hidden in its trunk. One day, years ago—yes, it seems a lifetime since that day—I lingered by this stream, uncertain which way to turn—suddenly I saw her hand trembling on a branch of that tree. I looked again—it was a bird, which flew away and guided me back to Felsenstein. Perhaps it was a messenger of the Dryad dwelling in the trunk."

"Ah! Cousin Egon, perhaps it was. What happened then?"

"I met you!"

"You are laughing at me," she answered, somewhat abashed. "What have I to do with woodland sprites?"

"Everything, for with a wreath of holly you might be mistaken for one now."

Egon passed his hand through a lock of her hair. She blushed and gathered it into a coil upon her head.

"I look very wild, but the breeze is at fault. What would our good *Tante* Anna say?"

"You forget that we are in dreamland, and *Tante Annas* do not form a part of our existence."

There was something in his look that made her conscious.

"The bear you shot for Hulda was a magnificent fellow. I killed one in the Adirondacks last year, but it was smaller than yours," she said, apropos of nothing.

"You?" exclaimed Egon in surprise.

"Why not?"

"I can't imagine you with a rifle in your hands."

"Do I appear so helpless then?" A mischievous expression crossed her face—"See then if you can catch me."

She wheeled her horse before he could say a word, and darted out of the path up onto the high-road, and he heard the clatter of her horse's hoofs dying away in the distance. He mounted and followed, gaining slowly, although she held her own for a half a mile, till he dashed past and caught her bridle.

"You are my prisoner," he said.

A sudden desire to conquer this wild young

creature possessed him. How gently he would hold her! She should never feel his chain.

"To-day's run has quite unsettled me," she said as they turned their horses homeward. "I have been strictly proper for nearly three months. It pleases Franz. It isn't at all natural for me to be proper, Egon. You don't know what hard work I have; but to-day—to-day—"

"Well, what about to-day?"

"I feel as though I had wings!" she exclaimed impetuously.

CHAPTER XI.

FRANZ wrote from Carlshöhe, that the old Count's case seemed hopeless. His paroxysms were violent and his condition pitiable. He wandered over the Schloss, called for his dead daughter Prassedä, and reproaching her for deserting him in his weakness. Hours long he stood before her portrait in the great hall and talked to her as if she still lived. Dr. Schultz had been there twice since the Count was taken ill, and expressed the opinion that he might live for months, although any sudden shock might prove fatal. Therefore the Schloss was kept as silent as a tomb. Paul shook his head gravely, and wrote his old college friend a letter, asking him to run down to Felsenstein for a few days, but he did not come.

The *Manœuvres* were now taking place daily. There were twenty officers at the Schloss, Egon among them.

One morning Hulda suggested that they should drive to the place of rendezvous and witness the sham battle from a hill near by. The others received this proposal with acclamation.

The previous day Egon had been on the defeated side. The retreat had been made against his better judgment, although they were hard pressed. Of course he was not held responsible for it. His superior officer was a stubborn man of conservative ideas. At times his lieutenant's impetuosity seemed almost criminal to him. He held him constantly in check, warning him that some day he might overreach himself. Although Egon chafed under this reprimand, he was forced to listen and curb his temper. However, he had little confidence in his commander's military tactics, and hoped that Prassedá would not witness their defeat on the morrow.

She was all excitement when they drove away. It was a lovely day; the sky was cloudless. She sat on the box beside Paul, who drove four spirited gray horses, while Hulda, Anna and some visitors sat in the carriage

behind them. From time to time Paul pointed out the beauties of the Felsenstein forests. There was an expression of calm in his bronzed face, and his eyes twinkled beneath his shaggy brows with positive good-nature. Prassedá felt the influence of his mood. He was thoroughly at ease in his own domain, and enjoyed nothing more than driving through the woods with his little American cousin beside him.

"Do you like this sort of thing?" he said, looking at her face, which was flushed with anticipation.

"But, Uncle Paul, it is so necessary," she answered seriously.

"Egon has been filling your head with nonsense. It is only a relic of barbarism. Why can't men live at peace? Cutting a man's throat is a final way of settling an argument, but unsatisfactory. Now these men are training themselves to be expert assassins, that is all."

Prassedá looked grave.

"It seems to me glorious to die in defense of one's country," she said, and he,

remembering how Ulrich had died, remained silent.

They reached a knoll and looked down on the quiet fields below.

Some cows were standing under a clump of trees peacefully chewing their cud. A shepherd was guarding his flock hard by, assisted by two great dogs, who pricked up their ears and looked curiously at the intruders.

"There's contentment for you," said Paul. "Little wot they of the battle raging near." He laughed.

"How annoyed Egon was to have been on the losing side yesterday!"

"Yes," returned Prassedä quickly, "but he will win to-day."

"How so? Are you to be his champion?"

She colored and looked away. A child stood by the wayside holding a bunch of field flowers in its outstretched hand.

"Would *gnädiges Fräulein* deign to accept them," said the mother, who stood behind her.

There was a kindly expression in her heavy features that touched Prassedä. The calm of her life had been unbroken by sorrow.

The "*gnädiges Fräulein*" dropped a silver coin into the baby's palm, and took them. She loved wild-flowers. They brought back the memory of her native mountains.

Paul glanced at her shrewdly, and touched his horses. She came nearer to his heart than any one he had known for years.

Just then they heard the bugle, and knew they were approaching the field of the *Manœuvres*. Long platoons came into sight. Among the trees on the hill opposite shadows moved about mysteriously. Occasionally a soldier would expose himself to fire as he looked cautiously out to observe the movements of the enemy, a white handkerchief tied around his left arm to distinguish him from the opposing side. From time to time puffs of smoke issued from the trees.

Prassedá stood up on the box and leveled a pair of field-glasses to get a better view. They were now in full action. The voices of the officers reached their ears encouraging the men to resist the enemy's charge. She swept the scene in vain for Egon. Onward they went in a surging mass, only to be repulsed by the

handful guarding the height. In vain they rallied and advanced, again to fall back under a raking fire. The officers' voices rose above the din, shouting their commands in hoarse tones. At last, seeing that they must be overpowered unless reinforced, the little band determined on a daring sortie, and rushed down pell-mell on the advancing column. The lines wavered, gave way, then formed again, surrounding them with overwhelming force. Back to back they stood, fighting fiercely. They made a gallant stand, but they were struggling against fate, and the enemy closed around them.

Prassedá trembled with suspense. Where was Egon? A prisoner?

No. Suddenly when the tide was set full against them, a company of cavalry burst from behind a group of fir-trees on a slope some distance away.

No need to tell her who their brave leader was. She recognized her cousin, and her heart beat fast with joy. This mimic battle was real, this honor hers.

Encouraging the fainting men with cheers

they dashed on and attacked the enemy from the rear.

Back fell their foes in confusion. Quickly the young dragoon had come to the rescue, violating all settled rules by his unexpected charge.

Even the Colonel could not repress a smile of pleasure when he commended him in the presence of the whole battalion after the fight was over.

He had saved the day.

Left behind in command of a reserve force he watched the contest from a distance. His quick eye told him that the battle might be saved could he reach the clump of fir-trees with his men, by making a detour to the opposite hill and attacking the enemy's flank.

It was hard riding, over corn-fields and fences, but they did it and were heroes.

Prassedá looked at him proudly, as he galloped past on the homeward journey. Perhaps he read more in her glance than she intended.

He ran up the stairs that evening, tired and dusty from the day's hard work. He met Prassedá coming down. She was evidently going

out to tea, for a white cloak covered her dress and a white veil was thrown over her head. She was fastening her long tan gloves, and did not see him until he spoke. A vivid blush spread over her cheeks, and her eyes fell. She looked troubled and sought to avoid him. Upstairs in the hunting-hall, his comrades were singing snatches of songs and clinking their drinking cups. The light streamed through the cracks of the door and lighted the dark stairway.

"What has made you unhappy?" he asked, laying his hand on her arm. Prassedá turned away her head. Her whole being thrilled at his touch, and she dared not look into his face for fear he might read her heart.

"Sometimes the sea seems wide, Egon. I long for my own home."

"Your home is here with us," he answered, earnestly.

A peal of laughter sounded from the hall; a door shut at the end of the passageway. She fled like a hare, and left him. He passed through the hall, where his comrades were making merry over their supper, and entered his own room. Was he really beginning to love

this girl, he who had forsworn women? He opened his casement, and looked out over the lawn. The trees waved in the moonlight; the water lapped gently against the shore. He could see Prasseda sitting on the balcony below, with her white shawl still around her head.

He went down hurriedly to join her; but found that he had mistaken Hulda for his cousin. A feeling of revulsion came over him. Now that he had learned to distinguish the true from the false, he wondered at his former blindness. He leaned against the balcony and talked to her about the *Manœuvres*. Yes, he had won distinction, but it gave him no pleasure to hear her smooth flattery. The scent of roses filled the air, and took him back to that night in Paris when he had waited in the balcony of his hotel. His eyes wandered over Hulda's head to the corner of the gray Schloss, now deep in shadow. The window of Anna's boudoir was dimly lighted, and on the sill lay the bunch of roses; the dew glistened on their petals and their odor stifled him.

"A month ago you loved me, Egon."

Hulda's voice fell on the silent night, dis-

tinct and clear. There was a world of reproach in its tone, but he heeded her not; he was looking at the hand which stole out to take the roses.

Hardly knowing how, he reached the drawing-room. Anna's boudoir was dark. No one was there. He leaned against the window, trembling. The sill was still wet with the impress of the flowers, but they were gone. Had it been an apparition, or was it an illusion of his brain?

"A month ago you loved me," she had said. No; he had never loved till now.

CHAPTER XII.

PREPARATIONS for the ball went on vigorously. It was to be the great event of the season, and all the neighborhood was in a flutter of excitement. The military band from Grimma was coming, a pavilion had been erected in the garden for dancing, and the paths and woods were hung with Chinese lanterns. The costumes had been ordered from Dresden, and kept delightfully secret. Everything was to be a surprise. Franz would not arrive from England until the following day, and Hulda had not yet perfected her plans. Everything depended on the chances of this night. Paul seemed preoccupied. He had been writing and telegraphing all day. Towards dusk a carriage drove into the courtyard, bringing Dr. Schultz, with whom he was closeted for some time.

Later the maskers began to arrive. They represented every nationality and century, and soon

the house resounded with mirth. Paul and Anna alone were unmasked, the rest of the household concealing themselves behind various disguises. There was a Zingara who created much merriment by her skillful fortune-telling. At times her sharp tongue raised a blush behind the mask of some foolish swain who entered a tilt against her and cast doubt on her power. He got well ridiculed for his temerity. A Capucine monk stood in a corner watching a woodland nymph, whose long reddish hair betrayed her.

Out on the balcony two elderly dames were seated apart, talking earnestly.

"Have you seen the American?" one asked of the other. "She is said to be beautiful. Is it not sad?"

"Sad to be beautiful! A novel idea."

"Her beauty will but make her life harder to bear. Have you not heard that her mother was the Count von Arnim's mistress; a singer in the streets of New York?"

The woodland nymph stood on the threshold. She had come out of the crowd laughing and joyous, when the night air wafted these

words to her ears and froze the smile on her lips. Surely these women were mad, to talk such scandal. Her mother had been a lady of gentle birth, poor—who was not poor in the stricken South after the war,—but pure as a saint. Who dared circulate such reports about her? She would run after these wicked women and denounce them as scandal-mongers. She felt herself growing faint with horror, and she was powerless to defend her mother's memory. Could others believe this preposterous tale? Perhaps even now the whole world was pointing the finger of scorn at her. Where could she turn to learn the truth?

A crowd of revelers approached, following the gypsy, who threw back jesting words of prophecy at them. Although she drew deeper into the shadow, the Zingara's quick eye discovered her.

“Daphne, do not flee,” she cried, drawing the attention of the crowd upon her. “Apollo followeth not. Diana will not protect you. You appeal to her in vain. The curse that fell upon thy mother followeth thee. To be wooed, never to be wed, like thy mother,

is thy fate. Nor will thy beauty save thee."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the throng of maskers. "Here comes a holy monk to shrive thee. Daphne, listen not; his pious words are but a snare."

The nymph shrank back, and the maskers passed on. Behind came the monk, whose disguise she had already pierced. She could not meet him; her heart was crushed by the gypsy's terrible words. She fled up the path towards the forest, and when the prophet of evil returned there was no trace of the poor girl but a long gauze veil trimmed with oak leaves which she had dropped in her flight. On she hurried beyond the sound of music and of gayety, where alone with the stars and the rustling trees she could weep unseen. She sank exhausted at the foot of an oak and burst into a passion of tears. Suddenly steps approached her hiding-place, and she heard voices.

"Thank Heaven! we are out of that noise," exclaimed Paul. "One can hardly hear one's-self speak from the din."

"I have but a few moments more, old *Kamerad*," replied a strange voice. "I must catch the midnight train."

"And you think the Count's case is hopeless, Schultz?"

"Quite, as far as I can judge. If Prasseda were alive I might have hope. This restless longing for his daughter is wearing out his strength."

Prasseda stood erect and clasped the tree for support. They were talking about her grandfather, the man who had caused this cruel wrong to her mother's memory. Had he protected her, the world would never have dared doubt her honor. The evidence of her innocence was in his hands. Her heart burned with hatred against him for his injustice.

"He is very impatient of control, and it is difficult to get good nurses. I hope to find one waiting at the station in Berlin to-morrow."

Their voices were dying away.

If her grandfather should die without speaking, the stigma would always rest on her mother's name. The papers must be found. He would never dare destroy them. Perhaps,

after all, this was only idle talk, women were prone to gossip, her coming among them had been unexpected; she would ask Paul, and he would tell her the truth.

“Uncle Paul.”

The words sounded faintly, but he heard them and turned. She appeared in the moonlight like some spirit of the night.

“Uncle Paul,” called the sweet voice again, and he hastened back and lifted her from the ground. What was she doing there alone, wet through with the night dew?

She rested her head against his shoulder wearily.

“They are saying wicked things down there about my mother. We know they are not true. Oh! Uncle Paul, tell them that they slander her,” she said through her sobs.

Paul patted her affectionately on the cheek as if she were a child.

“There, child, don’t weep,” he said; and then added sternly, “Who told you this tale? Who has dared?”

Prassedá explained that she had only heard

gossips' talk, and afterwards the gypsy's cruel words confirmed the story.

The master of Felsenstein exclaimed beneath his breath :

"I thought as much! The viper!"

Prassedá drew away from him. He did not deny the justice of the report, but seemed only angered that it should reach her ears.

"My grandfather could set it right if he were sane?"

"We hope so," he answered, tenderly.

"Hope so! Then you think the story true."

Paul cast a look of reproach at her.

"I knew your father," he answered. "He was incapable of villainy."

She had misjudged him. But it seemed as if the whole world was against her. She extended both hands to him impulsively.

"Pardon me," she said brokenly. "I am not quite myself—I hardly know what I am doing."

The expression of sympathy in his rugged face haunted her, for it told her more than words. She went up the path towards the house. The music and laughter hurt her. The Zingara was standing on the threshold of

Hulda's room, when she passed up the stairs. Instinct had told her from the start that the Russian was her enemy.

* * * * *

The night was waning fast. Egon, in the monk's disguise, sought Prasseda in vain. He had exchanged a few jesting words with her early in the evening, but lost her in the crowd soon after.

He strolled through the park and gardens looking for her in vain. He must learn the truth that night. The suspense was unendurable. His love would outweigh wealth if she had a true woman's heart.

He lingered by the lake ; the night was fine. If she were there he would row her out into the still water, as he had done that morning on the river ; but she was not there. He was alone and wretched, because he could not find her.

A light laugh sounded from the bushes near by, and a white figure, enveloped in a veil and crowned with oak-leaves, flitted past. This time she should not evade him. He followed her closely. Twice she had boasted that she

was swifter of foot than he; now he would prove the fallacy of her theory.

On she tripped and disappeared under the dark pillars supporting the balcony. She had taken refuge in the garden-room, from which there was no egress save those guarded by his vigilant eyes. It was dark when he entered. The clouds obscuring the moon betokened a storm. Over in a corner he could see her white form moving in the dim light.

"At last I have caught thee, Daphne," he whispered, and, bending low, encircled her in his arms.

Her heart beat wildly against his breast, and her breath came fitfully as he drew her to a bench under the trellis vine.

"Let me go."

It was but a feeble protest.

"You are mine by right of conquest. I love thee, woodland spirit. Let us return to thy woods and live in dreamland together."

He could see her dark eyes shining behind the mask, and her unbound hair fell like a cloud upon his breast, making him shiver as if a serpent had wound him in its coils.

“Do not jest with me.”

How sweet was her voice. It thrilled his heart.

“Jest with thee. By the gods I swear—”

“Thine oath will be registered, cousin. Think well.”

There was a subtle challenge in her tone. She would hold him to it. Why not? Had he not cast thought to the winds? She was his love, his chosen wife, in the face of the world. His arm should shield her from the gibes of a too righteous community.

“Would you marry me under any guise?” she whispered, “Oh, Egon!”

The ardor of her tone made his blood run fire in his veins. He would have hazarded his soul's peace for her then. Her head fell back upon his shoulder; her lips parted in a smile of triumph. Slowly her basilisk gaze drew him down to seal the compact with a kiss—when the moon came out and crept along the wall.

A woman, tall and graceful, seemed to float towards him, raising a hand in warning. A white veil drawn across the lower part of her face disguised her features, but enhanced the brill-

iancy of her eyes. Egon saw the mystic ring upon her extended hand, and knew that she had come to save him from some hidden danger. He took one step forward, his arm still supporting the woman who had thrilled his blood but a moment ago. A sudden doubt crept into his mind. Some one was playing a trick on him. He stood in the moonlight and looked down upon her. Her fair hair had lost its color in the darkness of the night.

It was not Prassedá whom he held in his arms, but an enemy.

Quick as thought he tore the mask from her face, and disclosed the mocking eyes of Hulda.

The moonlight died out and left him in darkness; the vision had disappeared.

Egon recoiled from her in horror.

She laughed contemptuously.

“What has chilled thy ardent love so suddenly? It is so easy to trap a man. It required but an oak wreath and a white veil to make you mad.”

He heeded not her sarcastic tongue, and his silence enraged her.

"You love *her*—her, an outcast without name or race."

"How dare you slander her!" exclaimed Egon, incensed at her tone.

"What right have you to constitute yourself her champion?"

"The right every man has to protect the woman he loves."

She paused to gather the full force of his words. He loved Prassedá. He did not hesitate to tell her the truth without disguise. How little regard he had for her feeling in the matter. But now she had felt his passionate embrace, knowing in her heart that he mistook her for Prassedá, yet trying to deceive herself into believing she might still reclaim his love. That was over now. They were antagonists; he bent on defending, she on destroying, her rival. Who would conquer?

"You come too late, Egon. Your Prassedá is bespoken."

"What do you mean?"

Probably it was some new device to mislead him.

"Franz, your benefactor, the man to whom

you owe everything in this world, is to marry her."

"It is false."

This announcement struck him like a blow. Even as he denied it, he believed it to be true.

"He certainly has the balance in his favor," the cold voice continued. "Can you give her back the Arnim estates which are hers by right?"

"You acknowledge this?"

"By moral right. No one would deny that she is Ulrich's child."

"You tell me this to torture me. A month ago he was to be your husband. Must he always stand in my way? I'll not believe it."

"A month ago it was your own delightful suggestion," she retorted. "Ask Paul—he knows. It is an act of restitution."

"These estates are hers by right," he said in a tone of conviction.

She stared and looked at him keenly. This was a new move on his part. Did he know? Did he suspect? She turned pale in the moonlight and shook her head, assuming indifference.

"They cannot prove it."

"It shall be proven!" he exclaimed, grasping her by the wrist roughly. "You were at Carlshöhe when those papers arrived. What became of them?"

He frightened her. He looked as though he would kill her. How could she be held responsible for the papers? He could prove nothing.

Her laugh enraged him beyond control, and his strong hand closed on her like a vise.

"You stole them," he said, "and hid them away, but I will find them. I will search the earth over till I find them. I will begin at Carlshöhe, where you stole them."

He felt her wince under his words. They had been hidden at Carlshöhe. He was right. Then she was filled with a sudden dread. What if he should carry out his threat and search the Schloss. Better throw him off his guard entirely. Better, since he suspected her, and his doubts could never be dispelled, he should believe Prasseda's claim quite hopeless. There were no copies of the documents in existence.

"Where are they hidden?" he asked again, still grasping her with cruel power. He was unconscious of the fact that he still held her. He would wring the secret from her soul.

"They are beyond your reach," she said, trying to form a defiant smile with her white lips. "Burned to ashes."

"You dared?"

"I hate her."

He flung her off as he would a reptile, and she left him alone. The venom of her tone filled him with horror. He believed her capable of any treachery to meet her ends. He sat down on the bench and tried to think. If Franz were a suitor for Prasseda's hand she was lost to him forever. Honor would not permit him to stand in his benefactor's way. He must leave Felstenstein at once without seeing her again. That was the only way for him to preserve his honor. And yet how could he leave her unprotected against this woman, who was as subtle as a Spaniard. Franz would believe nothing against her.

Those papers were destroyed, but might they not be duplicated? Surely he might have

some chance of finding the witnesses to this marriage in America. He knew Prassedá's history as well as his own. He might be able to trace her mother's life sufficiently to get proof of her marriage. There was no time to be lost if he wished to accomplish his task while the Count still lived. If he stayed there he would commit some folly. To live in the same house with her and not tell his love would be impossible. If he were working for her, at least he would not be so wretched. No one must know his purpose, for it might fail, and he must get away that night.

All was still in the gardens. The candles had burned low ; the guests would soon depart. The wind sighed through the trees. The moon emerged from behind the cloud, and threw its rays on the wall. Surely the warning figure glided forth to meet his eyes once more, or did he dream. The light fell upon the upraised hand. Egon rose and moved slowly towards her. She seemed to recede as he drew near. Now she stood still. He stretched forth his hand to touch her dress, and it fell upon the cold stone.

The vision was a painted picture on the wall. He started back with a low cry.

How came it there! He turned the gold frame to the light and read the characters upon it:

“Copy of a family portrait hanging at Carls-höhe. Katrina von Arnim, born 1604, died 1634; original by a distinguished painter. The property of Franz von Arnim.”

The picture fell back against the wall with a dull sound. He had often heard of his ancestress, Katrina von Arnim. Her beautiful eyes had been the toast of the North, where she broke men's hearts ruthlessly. He remembered vaguely having seen the original portrait at Carlshöhe when a boy. That trick of drawing the veil across her face like an Eastern princess strengthened the fascination of her wonderful eyes. She had succeeded in startling an Arnim, whose reputation for bravery was unchallenged. She had served him a good turn. Of course his superstitious fear was absurd. Alarmed by a picture! What a joke for his companions at mess! He would not tell the tale. Doubtless Franz had sent it over

from Carlshöhe during his recent visit. He would question him about it.

Then he grew serious ; he had seen Katrina's hand resting on a carriage window and afterwards on the hotel balcony in Paris. And the ring ? he had certainly seen it sparkle in the sunlight ; his eyes had not deceived him ! Could it be that his fair ancestress was haunting him ? Certainly the discovery of this picture strengthened the mystery. He had read of such things. A friend of his had been warned of his death by an uncanny sign which was customary in their family. He had never heard that the Arnims possessed a family ghost. At least it was reserved for him to discover it.

Although he tried to reason himself into a commonplace frame of mind, he could not shake off the influence this strange specter had had upon him. She had saved his life twice, but now she had saved his honor.

CHAPTER XIII.

DO we not all know, when grief sweeps over us, how music hurts and laughter echoing through an open window cuts like the knife of an enemy? Prasseda buried her face in her pillow and tried to shut out the sound. They were playing an old German waltz, which brought back memories of her home. Why had she ever left it? Those rude people who had seen her mother die, knew that she was true. Her own beauty was a snare, so the gossips had said. No one respected her. Some had pitied, but others scorned her. Paul looked at her with sorrow. Even he could find no answer to her questions. And Egon; did he believe it, too? How could she blame their doubts, since there was nothing to support her word?

The world was pitiless.

She had wept her heart dry. There were no more tears to shed. She could not stay

another hour beneath that roof. How could she meet their curious faces in the morning? They had doubted from the first; she alone had been unconscious and blind. She pressed her hands to her throbbing temples and tried to concentrate her thoughts. What should she do? Her grandfather could help her, but he was insane. Suddenly she started up struck by a new idea. The doctor had said there might be hope for him if Prasseda were alive. And she resembled this sister of her father. Franz had recognized her by this wonderful likeness. Why might she not go to Mecklenburg as his nurse? Stranger things had happened. She was not afraid, and Minerva would protect her. The doctor expected to meet a woman at the station in Berlin. Why could she not impersonate the woman? A little management might be necessary. It was a desperate chance. She could take Minerva and leave by the morning train. No one would know where she had gone. If her plan failed, it would be a simple matter to follow the doctor to Mecklenburg. He need not know her secret unless he refused to take her

with him. Then her resemblance to Prasseda would stand her in good stead.

Stifling her sobs, she roused Minerva, who started at her mistress's appearance.

"Mammy, don't talk to me, but do as I bid."

The negress nodded her head, eagerly.

"Pack what is absolutely necessary in a hand-bag and prepare to leave with me," she said wearily.

Minerva did not question, but obeyed blindly. Missy was in trouble, and she would follow her wherever she led. Perhaps back again to the good old home among the mountains.

She crept noiselessly round putting the things together, while her mistress sat before the writing-table trying to write Franz a few words. Perhaps he would misjudge her, but she must run the risk. He had been kind to her. Out of kindness he might hold her back from an undertaking which seemed wild. No, she would give him no explanation. She must act entirely on her own responsibility.

Her tears fell on the paper and blotted its surface. She dried her eyes and tore up many

sheets before she was satisfied. At last she finished these hastily scrawled lines:

“I am going away, dear Franz. Forgive me. Perhaps I have illy repaid your goodness, but I could not stay, knowing the truth. Do not seek to follow me, I beg of you. It will be useless. Some day you may understand.

“PRASEDA.”

She folded, sealed and addressed the note, then left it in a conspicuous place on her desk. It was vague enough to mislead him, but she must be alone and untrammelled. Minerva touched her arm. All was ready. Quietly they stole down the stairs out into the garden. The day was beginning to dawn and the moist air revived her. As she passed Paul's study she saw that his window was open. The light was out. Probably he slept.

Taking a bunch of violets from her dress, she wrote two words on a card and fastened it to the stems, then laid it gently on his desk through the open window.

He must not think ill of her.

They took the short path over the fields to the station, and arrived just before the train was

due. There was another passenger pacing impatiently up and down the platform.

Prassedá drew her veil closer over her tear-stained face, for she had recognized Dr. Schultz, who had been belated and had missed the early train.

The express whistled into the station. She entered a second-class *Damen Coupé*, followed by Minerva, while the doctor settled himself comfortably in a smoking coach, little guessing the proximity of his would-be nurse and her companion.

When they reached Berlin, Prassedá bade her maid wait in an inner room, while she proceeded to put her plan into execution.

Fate had made it easy for her. The nurse, tired of waiting, had left the station. The doctor walked up and down restlessly, looking at his watch from time to time. Evidently the person he expected had failed to receive his telegram.

In a few minutes he must leave, and without his attendant; it was most provoking.

Suddenly a sweet voice accosted him.

Was he looking for a nurse to go with him

to Mecklenburg? He lost his impatient frown, although this slender veiled figure looked little like a professional nurse to his experienced eye.

In the dim light of the station her face looked familiar, but when she threw back her veil he was fairly startled. It was as though the original of that picture which hung in the old Count's study stood before him.

She noticed his perturbed expression.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Miss Simons."

"Ah! English?"

She let the query pass.

"Have you had experience with insane patients?"

She repressed a shudder at the question.

"I will be frank, Doctor. I have had little experience in nursing. You would find me willing." Her voice trembled.

The great hand on the clock moved slowly around. But ten minutes more were left.

"I suppose the woman I expected sent you in her place. It was a strange idea to give such a charge to one of so little experience."

He hesitated; there must be some mystery here, and yet he could trust the girl. She looked honest. There was no time to seek references just now. This remarkable likeness to the Count's dead daughter might prove of service, even to outweighing her lack of knowledge. It puzzled him nevertheless.

"You are ready?" he asked abruptly.

"Quite."

"The train leaves in ten minutes. I will join you here."

And then, like a man who had been relieved of a great anxiety, he walked away.

Prassedà waited until he was out of sight; then called Minerva from the inner room. Taking a card from her case, she wrote hastily a few words and handed it to her faithful servant.

"Mammy, I am going to leave you for a little while. Don't say a word, but listen. Go to this address and you will find Miss Russell, who crossed on the steamer with us to Havre, you remember. Give her this card, and she will keep you until I write. It may be weeks, Mammy, but wait patiently. My happiness

depends upon your following my orders explicitly."

"God bless you, Miss Seda," exclaimed honest Minerva, the tears streaming down her wrinkled black cheeks. "Yer can trust me, honey."

Prassedá had only time to call a *commis-sionaire*, and give the servant into his charge, when Dr. Schultz reappeared and called her to take the train.

She followed him and entered the carriage mechanically. The door shut to with a sharp click. She had not yet rallied from the shock that had stricken her down. She saw the Zingara's face always before her, and her mocking laugh rang in her ears. She leaned her head against the cushions of the coupé; the wind swept in through the open window, but she did not heed it. The doctor spoke, and she answered dreamily. He felt her pulse with business-like precision, and drew a shawl around her shoulders. He was a cold, practical man, who was interested in an experiment. His assistant had evidently received some mental shock, which she had self-control

enough to overcome. He realized that much of his success might depend upon her nerve. She uttered no cry and gave no sign, although she was suffering. It looked well for the future.

The train slowly slackened its speed. Praseda looked out wearily, but could distinguish nothing in the darkness. The doctor roused himself with a start, looked sharply at his companion, and called to the guard to open the door. They were the only passengers to descend; the train sped on quickly, leaving Praseda with a redoubled sense of loneliness. The autumn wind whistled through the deserted station, and the windows rattled drearily.

After driving some distance along the sea-coast, they turned into a road where the wheels rolled noiselessly over the soft earth. Trees flew past like specters, till the lights of Schloss Carlshöhe glimmered near at hand.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN the sun rose next morning at Felsenstein, sparrows were chirping in the branches of the oak before Prasseda's window, and beating their bills against the casement where she was wont to feed them. All was silent within; even Minerva's good-natured face was missing. Hulda listened for some sign of life in the Schloss. The recollection of the evening just past was like a nightmare. She could sleep no more. Tossing off the silken quilt, she stepped softly from her bed and listened at Prasseda's door. Evidently she still slept soundly. Well for her that she could forget her troubles so easily; and yet her words had rained upon her like blows. What power the Zingara's mask had lent her! She lifted the portière quietly and opened the door. Prasseda was not there. Everything was in confusion. Dresses and trinkets were tossed about as though the north wind had blown in on them during the night.

A housemaid was standing before the open wardrobe gazing in dismay at the disorder.

She told Hulda that Prassedá had not slept in her bed, and the black woman was nowhere to be found. The first thing that caught Hulda's eye was the little note on the dressing-table, which she quickly abstracted unnoticed by the servant. Hurrying back to her room, she broke the seal and mastered its contents. She read her triumph in every line, and could hardly refrain from an exclamation of joy.

Prassedá, overcome with shame, had fled the house. So much the better. Perhaps she had drowned herself in the lake.

Dressing herself hastily, she descended the stone stairs to the garden, where Anna, armed with a large pair of shears, was cutting roses.

"Up so early?" said Anna in surprise. "I hardly expected to see you for hours. I declare, the maskers so upset my nerves that I thought I should be ill for a week. Although the poor officers danced all night they went off to the *Manœuvres* just the same at daybreak." Evidently *Tante* Anna was still unaware of Prassedá's flight.

"All except Egon."

Hulda started. She had been betrayed through anger into revealing things much better hidden. And yet what harm could he do her? He could not prove her guilt. It was much better for him to learn once for all the futility of this American girl's claim.

"I wonder," remarked Anna, as she cut a red rose from the bush, "where Egon was going? He wore a dark cloak over his uniform, and he looked wild and excited. He kissed me twice. Hulda, something unusual must have happened."

Hulda laughed.

"Because of his sudden accession of tenderness?"

"'Where are you going at this time of night?' said I.

"'To the Antipodes, *Tante*,' said he.

"Now, I wonder if his regiment could have been ordered to this heathen place. It isn't often that I have an impression, Hulda. Mark my words, something has happened."

After delivering the foregoing with stately impressiveness she picked up her shears and

entered the house. Directly afterwards she called Hulda in to pour Paul's coffee, as the housekeeper had sent her an urgent message, to which she must attend immediately.

Hulda found Franz in the breakfast-room. He had arrived by early train, and mounted the stairs softly for fear of disturbing her morning slumbers. He sat down at the table beside her, and spoke of his visit at Carlshöhe. How changed his uncle was! He could hear nothing of the papers, for they were nowhere to be found. Hulda shrugged her shoulders expressively.

They talked about the ball. It had been a brilliant success, and, of course, she had been charming. At last he asked for Prasseda. Where was she? How did she look? His time of probation had seemed interminably long. Hulda tried to turn him from the subject; but he rebelled. He was burning to hear all that happened since he left. It was cruel to keep him in suspense any longer.

Hulda was silent. His suspicions were at once aroused.

Suddenly they were startled by a prolonged scream from the upper rooms.

"Great Heavens!" he exclaimed. "Has every one in Felsenstein gone crazy?"

Anna threw open the door and sank breathless on the sofa.

"Prassedá!" she gasped. "Give me some water, quick. I shall faint! Prassedá!"

"Where is she?" said Franz.

"Don't ask me. She has disappeared—run away. Her bed had not been slept in. I am not responsible for your wild American girls. I was always kind to her, I am sure. What have I done that this should happen here at Felsenstein? What will everybody say? Oh! Franz, Franz, why did you bring her here to disgrace us all?" she cried, bursting into tears.

Franz seized her by the arm and tried to shake some reason into her befuddled brain.

His forced calmness was more terrible than passion.

"Do you mean that she has left this house alone? You must find her and bring her back."

"The black woman went with her!"

"There must be some reason for this sudden departure. Tell me the truth. What have you done to drive her away?"

Anna shrank back from his anger and began to cry. Hulda looked on unmoved.

"Egon must help me."

"Egon too is gone," answered Anna.

"Gone! Where?"

"Oh! horrible suspicion," she exclaimed, holding up her hands in fright at the thought, "What if they should have gone together!"

"Together! Anna!" cried Franz, turning white with passion, "what are you saying?"

"This comes of allowing American free manners to reign unchecked at Felsenstein. What is the natural result of their everlasting rowing and riding together? Mischief, of course. I am an old woman, I know nothing. I must leave her education to you forsooth. I have narrow views. Very well, I hope you are satisfied."

The words poured like a torrent from her lips. Franz seemed too stunned to heed them. He rang the bell and inquired the hour of

Egon's departure. One of his horses was still there and at the *gnädiger* Herr's disposal.

Franz ordered the servant to have it saddled at once. He was going to Grimma. His brother should refute the lie.

All day long they waited for his return. Anna had been walking aimlessly about bemoaning her fate, but Hulda put her on her guard. They must avoid scandal at any cost. Paul had driven to a distant part of the estate to see some timber which was ready for cutting, and was still ignorant of the excitement at the Schloss. Hulda was possessed by the demon of jealousy. They had escaped together, to dream unmolested under some fair Italian sky. The day of reckoning must come; meanwhile, there would be days of untold happiness, and her jealous mind could easily picture the scene. He loved her rival as she had never been loved. How tender was his look, how impassioned his voice, that night when he declared his love, believing her to be Prasseda, disguised by the veil and wreath of Daphne! And she had sacrificed everything for wealth which, after all,

might never be hers. Should she ever forget his look of horror when he recognized her? How she hated this American girl! Some day they should feel the blight of her revenge!

She wandered through the park like one possessed. Her words to Egon had made him desperate; how else could he have thrown honor to the winds.

She stood by the stile where they had parted weeks ago, and waited for his brother. He would come by that path, for it was shorter. Yes, he was coming at last, but with head bent down, his step uncertain. Her worst fears were confirmed before he reached her.

"Never speak his name again," he said.

"So it is true! Did you see him?"

"See him!" he laughed aloud. "Should I be here? He had already fled."

"Whither?"

"That is the question. He has taken leave of absence for six months. There were rumors of America, but he proceeded with such secrecy that no one knows his real destination. Why, if he loved her, did he not tell me so frankly?"

“Franz,” said Hulda, “perhaps I am to blame.”

He looked into her face and shook his head.

“You are the only bright spot in this cloud, Hulda. How could you be to blame? You could not foresee that my brother would prove a rascal.”

His emotion choked his utterance.

“I knew last night,” she said, with downcast eyes, “that he loved her, and told him of your intention to marry Prassedá. The thought seemed to make him desperate. You were expected to-day—”

“I understand, and so they fled. An officer cannot marry without permission; his bride must have a certain dowry. They have no money. It is the folly of infatuation.”

Hulda tried to persuade him that the fault was Prassedá's. She had planned it all. It was the adventurous blood inherited from the mother. But his brother replied that Egon was not a man to hide behind a petticoat. He must answer for his dishonor. He had left a loophole for himself in not resigning, knowing well the dream would end some day.

Hulda expressed her sympathy with tenderness. What would she not give to save him from pain! And yet she had foreseen it. She knew how unworthy of his trust the girl was. Through the little ways by which a woman learns to read another, even as Franz had said, she had judged her light and frivolous, although to him Prassedá had always appeared the embodiment of innocence. She begged him to turn his thoughts from these ingrates, and be thankful for his own escape. Then bending down she looked into his eyes and added:

“That story of the packet was entirely unsupported by evidence. Perhaps it was a plausible tale invented by this girl to rouse your sympathy. Had she the true nature you suppose, would she have left you entirely without any explanation—you who have done so much for her?”

“God bless you, Hulda; you at least are true!” exclaimed Franz fervently; and he raised her hand to his lips tenderly, while she stooped over and kissed him on the brow.

It was this picture that surprised Paul on his way home from the woods. He looked, then

adjusted his glasses and looked again. He had overheard enough of their conversation to gather the drift of it, and it put him on his guard.

“Ah, ha!” thought he. “So bloweth the wind from that quarter. We must be cautious, Paul.”

And he went back into the wood and approached the Schloss from another road unseen.

When he reached home, he listened in silence to the tale told by his weeping sister. His heart was heavy with apprehension. But on his table lay a little bunch of faded violets. Two indistinct words were traced on a card attached to their stems. They were, “Trust me.”

CHAPTER XV.

CARLSHÖHE stands upon a rocky cliff, against which the waves beat incessantly. The sea-gulls circle over it and utter plaintive cries as if forecasting the old Count's death. He lives in dreams and cares not who supersedes him. He wanders about the park babbling of his childhood, then of his children as if they still lived. No one pities him. His servants are old and childish. He has outlived his day. And when he is gone, the Schloss will pass out of the direct line for the first time in generations.

Below the cliff is a little beach and then a wood, reaching almost to the water's edge. Out among the rocks are treacherous quicksands that have engulfed many an unwary traveler. Steps cut in the side of the cliff lead up to the Schloss, but they are moss-grown. Since Ulrich's day, no one has been venturesome enough to climb them, for the

broad carriage-road leading from the highway is a much safer conduct to the Schloss.

Its halls are empty and desolate. Steps send shuddering echoes through the corridors. Old Lena drops her candle, as a bat, frightened from its seclusion by the unusual glare, flits past her. She is almost blind now and quite lame. She sits in the tower chamber, and spins, and dreams again of the days when her good man, Jochen came to court her—as if the sod had not covered him these twenty years. She croons to herself an old song, keeping time with her turning wheel. The wind is rising; there is many a poor lad at sea, whose sweetheart is praying, as she used to pray before Jochen gave up his roving life and settled down to farming.

There came a fragile girl to Carlshöhe, as wife to the tyrannical master; later two children were born, but the mother hardly dared love them, for it would have been too much sunshine in her life. The gloom of the wild Schloss killed her, as it did her daughter years after. Surely the wind was rising. The candle flickered in the tower window and sank in its

socket. Some one was driving up the road. The horses stamped on the stone platform before the door; voices were calling impatiently.

Old Lena hobbled down the stairs and threw open the door wide. In the darkness she could see the dripping rubber coat of the *droschke* driver, who grumbled at the delay, while the watch-dogs bayed in the distance. A man descended from the carriage and offered his arm to a woman, who was so disguised by her wrappings that Lena could not get a glance to satisfy her curiosity. She led them into the hall and lighted the two wax candles on the bare carved table. The light flickered in the corners of the great room and brought into view a row of ghostly figures hanging on the walls. The travellers were evidently not expected. No message had been received; doubtless old Heinrich would bring the blue envelope with the mail from D—— in the morning. She listened quietly to the orders given by the man, who seemed to direct everything, and curtsied deferentially. Suddenly she glanced over his shoulder at his companion;

her eyes dilated with fear as she pointed quickly at her.

"What is it?" questioned the man sharply, although he knew what had caused her alarm. He studied the old woman's expression calmly.

"What is it?" whispered poor Lena, thoroughly frightened; "*Grosser Gott!* It is the *gnädiges Fräulein*, come to life again."

Her teeth began to chatter in her head.

"Foolish woman, what are you saying?" he replied, sternly. "I have brought the new English nurse with me, Miss Simons. The *gnädiges Fräulein*, indeed! The dead sleep soundly enough, remember that. Go and prepare the lady's room."

He turned his back abruptly on the curious old woman, and she left them muttering to herself.

Meanwhile Prasseda, who had taken off her wraps, looked about with interest. This was her father's home. In this place, far removed from cheerful companionship, he fretted his youth away. The wind moaned around the Schloss and increased her feeling of disquietude. Lena came back and lighted her to her cham-

ber in the tower, looking at her searchingly as they mounted the winding stair.

The room was simply furnished. Over the bed was a fresco of barnyard fowls, brilliant in color. It filled the entire wall, and seemed strangely incongruous with the surroundings. The wind rattled the casement, but Prasseda did not heed it. She was thinking of the task before her; the hope that hung on an insane man's life. At length she slept, lulled by the waves that washed the cliff below her window.

The next morning broke gloriously. The sun flooded her little room and wakened her from a dreamless sleep. The sea glittered with golden light. Over the cliff sailed white seagulls welcoming her by weird cries. She was the last of the line, the heiress of Carlshöhe. This was her home; no longer dreary in the light of morning, but majestic and wild. Her father had not been sad, but happy here. She remembered her mother's tales of his boyish adventures among the rocks that lined the shore. Only an unjust father could have driven him to foreign lands.

For the first time since she left America

Prassedá felt free. Here she could roam at will unbounded by the narrow circle of conventionality. — No *Tante* Anna to look at her reprovingly. There was nothing to check her ardor. She could breathe in the fresh sea air and gain strength for the task she had set herself.

If Max were here they would beat the forest together. It must be full of game. Poor Minerva! She would be lonely with these people in Berlin. She could see her black face drawn into an expression of despair, almost ludicrous in its intensity, but there was no help for it, since secrecy was necessary to her plan. She must sink her identity in the rôle of nurse. Her black maid would have betrayed her.

After dressing herself in a simple black gown, she put on a white apron and cap, and descended to the breakfast-room. She glanced at the pictured faces of her ancestors hanging on the oak-lined walls, and paused before the original of the portrait which had startled Egon at Felsenstein. A smile lighted her face. Care was forgotten. The massive walls of the Schloss parted, rolled away, and disclosed a

bend in the river. She could see Egon sitting in the bow of the boat, and hear his voice rising above the rushing water as he told his story of the mysterious hand. Here was a picture of the hand and ring. It did not surprise her; on the contrary, it seemed most natural to find it here in this old castle belonging to her people.

The doctor observed her unnoticed. He spoke twice before his voice recalled her from dreamland.

“How are you this morning?”

“As usual, doctor,” she replied, recovering her self-possession; “and ready.”

“Then come with me.”

She followed him through the hall to a small suite of rooms overlooking a terraced garden.

A fountain played in the center, and intersecting paths formed beds of brilliant flowers. The sitting-room was wainscoted in carved oak, out of which peeped the faces of saints and cherubs. Two angels supported the high mantel-piece, where a fire was laid ready for lighting. There were some book-shelves beyond it, and a case of guns. Some fishing

tackle hung over the fire-place twined round a wicker basket. Behind a portière was a chamber furnished with an iron bed. The window leading to the terrace reached the ground. It was open, and the soft summer air filled the room with fragrance.

The doctor led Prassedà across the terrace to the other side of the Schloss, and into a study which was lighted by high gothic windows. There was a velvet curtain hanging on the wall, which he pulled aside, disclosing the picture of a beautiful girl, the very counterpart of herself.

It was a portrait of the dead Prassedà. The doctor looked critically at her a moment, and shook his head.

"Go to your room, my dear, and take off that disguise. It will never do," he said. "Put on one of your simplest dresses and come back here."

Prassedà nodded assent and hurried away.

When she returned an old man was standing beside the doctor. His white hair and beard lent him the air of a patriarch. He stood erect, without support—and at first gave

the impression of great bodily strength. It was only when one looked into the pallid face and met the roving eye that his weakness was discernible. Those bright black eyes sunken under heavy brows had brought terror to more than one heart in their day.

The old Count sank into a chair before the portrait and looked at it long and earnestly.

"Always the same!" he said mournfully; "Always the same silence. I cry in vain. She will not answer. Draw the curtain, I say," he commanded testily. "Shut out the counterfeit. I would see the real. I would hear her voice. I would hear her begging forgiveness—for Ulrich—who went across the sea. Why do you not do as I command?"

The doctor smoothed his hand gently and quieted him with a look. He dropped the curtain over the picture and endeavored to divert the old man's attention. Would he not walk with his guest around the garden and point out the beauties of Carlshöhe?

"Prassedä, lend your father an arm," he said. She stepped quickly forward.

"Prassedä!" muttered her grandfather. He

looked into her face wistfully as if dazed, and struggled with his fading memory.

"Come, my daughter," he said presently, and smiled.

They walked through the gardens in silence; he leaning on her arm and looking now and then into her face with a questioning glance that roused her pity. All her bitterness faded before his helplessness. She could not cherish resentment against this weak old man, however deeply he might have wronged her.

When they returned to the house she left him and went up to her tower chamber. The sun had gone, and the sea looked cold and cheerless. Would she fulfill her mission? Would her presence really calm and prolong his life?

Dr. Schultz went back to Schwerin that evening, promising to return the next day, and she was left alone with the patient. She had had little experience in nursing, and, although the doctor had left explicit directions, she felt uncertain of her capability. The Count had his regular attendants who remained with him during the hours when she wished to rest, but the

old man would hardly allow her out of his sight. Old Lena eyed her suspiciously and seemed to regard her presence with disfavor. What right had a nurse to look like their sainted "*gnädiges Fräulein*"?

Dr. Schultz had explained that this strange resemblance might be the means of curing her master. He warned the housekeeper against referring to it. The delusion must be complete. So when the old man called for his daughter, Lena knew that the English nurse was wanted; but she was jealous of his preference and found it difficult to disguise her feeling.

That night, after the doctor had gone, Prasseda was awakened and called to the bedside of her grandfather, who had been seized with a paroxysm. Although she had striven to prepare herself for this ordeal, she found it more horrible even than her imagination had painted.

Two men were supporting him and trying in vain to quell his fears. Behind him his son Ulrich seemed to stand like an avenging specter, demanding justice for his past cruelty.

The old man crouched in an arm-chair and put up his hands feebly to protect himself from his accuser; his eyes, starting from their sockets, glared over his shoulder as if fixed on some invisible presence; the drops stood on his ashen face, and his breath came in labored gasps.

Praseda trembled with horror at the scene. Outside the water dashing against the rocks in dull monotone added to the desolation. She was shut up alone in this strange house with a madman.

"Away from me, Ulrich! Leave me in peace. The fault was mine," he cried; "I will atone; only leave me. See the blood dripping on the floor! He was killed in battle. See, he threatens me! He is coming. Ah!"

He rose shrieking, and tried to flee, but terror held him chained, and with a shuddering cry he sank fainting to the floor.

A cool hand was laid upon his brow. Praseda whispered words of comfort in his ear. He opened his eyes and stared at her a moment. She caressed his hand and put her arms around his neck tenderly.

"*Mein theures Kind,*" he murmured, with a sigh of relief; "*Bist du es? Jetzt ist mir wohl.*"

And Prassedà for the first time in her life lost consciousness under the strain.

When she came to her senses he had fallen into a refreshing sleep, the first natural rest he had enjoyed for days. She watched by him for hours, sitting in a cramped position for fear of awakening him, and vowed henceforth to devote herself to her task faithfully.

During the day her grandfather seemed more quiet and rational. It was at night that these violent attacks seized him and made him a terror to himself and those watching near.

Next morning Prassedà went out to walk in the wood along the shore. The house oppressed her. She was still weighed down by the scene of the previous night, and felt that if she was to keep her health and strength she must live in the free air as much as possible.

She picked her way over the stones until she came to a rock where the waves dashed up and broke in white foam on its jagged front. Not a cloud was to be seen. Little sails dotted

the horizon ; and above her the Schloss towered threateningly.

Felsenstein had sunk out of her life as though it had never existed. What of Egon? Had he forgotten her? Although no word had been spoken between them, she knew that he loved her. He had told her so in many ways. His tender solicitude for her happiness, his very avoidance of her, was proof that she was beloved. There was some barrier between them. What, she could not know. She trusted him thoroughly. He could not doubt her, and even if the gossip were true, she knew well that he would not judge her harshly.

She pondered thus, sitting on the rock and looking out to sea. The wind blew her hair in little rings around her brow, and brought the color to her pale cheek. She shaded her face and glanced across the beach. Her quick eyes had discerned a figure of a man standing in the shadow of a rock some distance away. He seemed to hesitate.

Beyond the tide was receding, leaving bare the quicksands. A path led past them up through the wood. It added to the distance

by a mile or more, and those not familiar with the danger of the shifting sand would naturally attempt by crossing it to shorten the journey towards the Schloss. He looked toward the woods, then up at Carlshöhe, and stepping out took the perilous path towards her.

Her heart stood still with dread.

As far as the rocks continued there was safety. Let him once place his foot on the quivering beach and his doom was sealed.

She stood up and waved her handkerchief to attract his attention and warn him. He saw her and mistook her signal for a greeting, and approached more eagerly.

She knew that graceful figure too well. It was Egon.

A boat, moored in the little inlet below the cliff, moved to and fro on the waves. In a had moment she jumped into it and pulled out with quick strokes towards him, crying,

“Wait, for God’s sake, Egon!”

He, seeing that she would pass him, turned and retraced his steps.

When she ran the boat ashore he was terrified by her pallor. She held him by both hands,

and trembling from head to foot, exclaimed, "A step more and you would have been lost;" then pointing towards the glistening beach she told him of his danger.

Afterwards they sat under a pine and talked together. How had he found her there? She thought her secret hidden. Did the others know? What had Franz said at her sudden departure? He must tell her everything. He was embarrassed by her eager questions. He knew nothing. By chance he had seen Minerva in the streets of Berlin, and after much persuasive argument had learned enough to make him suspect that his cousin was at Carlshöhe. What had made her leave Felsenstein so suddenly? That was some mystery, for the black woman had sworn him by cabalistic signs to secrecy, saying that her mistress would kill her for betraying her.

Then Prasseda told him the truth. She had heard the gossip concerning her birth that night, and determined to escape secretly. Did he think it wrong? How could he censure her? He longed rather to take her in his arms and tell her that he was her champion. The im-

pulse almost overmastered him, but he was in honor bound. He would fight these scandal-mongers and crush them all.

How beautiful she had looked when she came to warn him of his danger. Did she love him? His heart said yes, but yet he might not speak. Even if her rights were proven he might not speak. Still less then than now when she was nameless and unknown. That was Franz's prerogative. He would inherit Carlshöhe. It would be his privilege to offer her as a gift the inheritance which was hers by right.

Only when she had refused to marry his brother should he be free to speak of his love. However, he could not help coming to see her before leaving for America. Minerva's strange excitement had alarmed him. Some harm might have befallen her mistress; but she was safe at Carlshöhe. He could leave her there without uneasiness, and start on what might be a vain search. He had come simply to hear her voice, to press her hand. He had not thought what he should say. He was conscious only of her presence, and she forgot to ask his errand.

The sun rose high in the heavens, and a distant clock struck the hour.

She started to her feet. Too long had she tarried, forgetting her grandfather in her happiness.

"I must go back," she said.

Egon stood up and held out his hand.

"The hours have flown. Good-bye."

"Good-bye? Are you not coming with me?"

"I could not go so far away without saying good-bye."

"Where are you going?"

Her face was troubled: all the light faded from it.

"I am going on a quest."

He looked into her questioning eyes, and hesitated. Why trouble her? Why raise hopes that might never be realized? If he were successful she would know soon enough. If not, then he need never tell her. She had been cut to the quick by cruel gossip; better not add to her pain.

"My mission here is ended since I have seen you, cousin," he said, raising her hand to his lips.

"I do not understand," she replied gravely, "but I trust you, Egon."

"Through good repute and ill?"

"Through everything."

She went up the path through the wood, and long after her figure had faded in the distance he stood thinking. Then he looked at the foam-tipped waves, the rocks, and the smiling quicksands, at the flag flying from the tower of the Schloss, and slowly retraced his steps toward D——.

He passed as he turned back an aged crone leaning on a stick, who looked after him curiously.

"*Du lieber Gott!*" she muttered. "Yesterday I saw the ghost of our sainted *gnädiges Fräulein* reflected in the English woman's face. To-day I see the young master walking through the forest. 'Tis his very gait. Ah me! I am growing old and childish. Strange fancies, to see a likeness to my masters in every passer-by."

CHAPTER XVI.

MEANWHILE at Felsenstein Paul tried in vain to solve the problem of Egon and Prassedá's strange disappearance. His cynicism prompted him to believe the worst. It was his belief that people usually followed their inclinations in defiance of law and reason, concealing all traces, if possible. Egon was a gentleman's son. He could not be guilty of cowardice; but he was human, he loved Prassedá, and not being able to have her by legitimate means, chose others. The evidence was strongly against them. The station-master had described the man who left by early train, accompanying the lady and her black servant. It fitted Egon, for Schultz was tall and blond like the dragoon. The others ceased to doubt, and found voice only to condemn.

The little bunch of faded violets told another story. "Trust me," she had said. Why should he not trust the child? He was an old

fool to have faith in any woman. Well, then he was satisfied to be an old fool.

He said nothing of his doubts. The others might think what they pleased; he should await developments. The thought that Egon had gone to America in search of the proof of Ulrich's marriage sometimes occurred to him, but he had no proof that the young officer had gone on any such Quixotic errand. Franz's theory was more plausible. He had taken six months' leave to spend it with his love. Men were not heroes in these days. But a voice whispered, "Trust me" in his ear, and he repudiated the doubt with scorn.

And so weeks passed.

Franz was still at Felsenstein, with Hulda. She played the rôle of consoler to perfection. She understood his thoughts and answered them. Every want was satisfied even before he had spoken. She walked with him and made herself indispensable in many ways. She was thoroughly in earnest now.

Franz turned to her entirely. Having lost faith in Egon, Prasseda was of little moment.

His feeling for her had been one of sympathy. Now he despised her for her deception.

Hulda had destroyed her plaintive appeal for forgiveness. He did not know that she had written, and her ingratitude seemed blacker for the omission.

At last, encouraged by Hulda's tenderness, he declared his love. She was terrified by the strength of feeling she had roused. He was no longer a tool in her hands, but a master made imperious by passion. He could not bear her out of his sight. He was jealous of her thoughts. Having at last yielded her love to him, he would guard it with his life. Henceforth her days should be passed with him in England, away from all painful memories. She should find happiness with him alone, a prospect which she did not view with unalloyed pleasure. The complacent Franz had become a tyrant, who might prove trying at some future time. He clasped her in his arms and held her close, swearing that naught but death should part them. Even then his love should reach beyond the grave and bring her back. Should she prove false like the rest, he would

kill her without remorse ; and he looked thoroughly capable of keeping his word.

Had it not been for Egon and her determination to win the game, she would have thrown Franz over and fled anywhere away from him, so distasteful did these scenes become to her. How could she bear it ? Her nights were spent in uselessly conjuring up pictures of her rival's happiness—her days in listening to the wild protestations of a love which found no response in her heart. Sometimes she doubted her strength to face the future. Franz was desirous of announcing their betrothal at once, but she urged as an excuse the precarious condition of the Count's health. No one but Paul and Anna knew it as yet. She felt a constant anxiety about the hidden papers since she had disclosed the secret to Egon. She could not rest as long as they were not destroyed. Some one might stumble on the hiding-place, as she had done, and find them.

Soon after Franz was summoned to England, and insisted upon making his engagement public before his departure.

Hulda received a letter from a cousin living

at Rabenhorst, near Carlshöhe, suggesting that she should come and visit there during her fiancé's absence. Although the invitation had been given in a jesting tone, for her Rabenhorst cousin knew well how little taste the gay Russian had for country life, she was surprised to receive an answer by return of mail. There was nothing that Hulda longed for more at that moment than to spend a few days in delightful, wild "Raven's Nest," and the time of Franz's absence in England would suit admirably. Elsa was not over-pleased, but having given the invitation at her father's command, there was nothing to be done.

Prassedá had no idea of her enemy's proximity.

The days passed quietly at Carlshöhe. Although the Count did not improve, at least he lost no ground. The terrible attacks to which he had been subject appeared at rarer intervals, and Prassedá began to hope again. She was always able to quiet him in these sudden paroxysms; her voice seemed to reassure him; but the strain was beginning to tell on her. She looked pale and worn.

She had told no one of Egon's visit to the Schloss. Indeed, no one would have been interested but the doctor, who came less often since his patient grew no worse. Old Lena continued to treat her with suspicion. Sometimes a sense of loneliness would steal over her. Her longing for companionship would become intolerable, and she would feel as if she could not endure living in this desolate castle, shut off from the world. The old woman, who occupied the chamber next her own, sat spinning silently, like one of the fates, day after day. She had known Prassedá's father; had loved him. What tales could she not tell his daughter, who was thirsting for a word of human sympathy? The silence, broken only by the dashing waves or a screaming night-bird, would drive her insane.

Once, when the old Count had had an uneasy night, she came up to her tower chamber, worn out in mind and body. Old Lena sat like the witch in a fairy tale, winding the yarn on a great wheel. The door stood open, and she peered curiously out at the hated English nurse through a crack in the curtain.

Prassedá forgot her caution, and went in to speak with her.

She looked up from her distaff and nodded. What did the intruder want with her? The bowed head and bony fingers gave sign of great age. She had spent her life in service of the Arnims. Perhaps she might talk of the Junker who died in exile. Oh, if this old woman had known the truth, how eagerly she would have welcomed her!

"The master is worse to-day," said Prassedá, sitting down on the stair.

No answer—the wheel whirred on.

"When he dies, what will become of you, Lena?"

The woman looked over her shoulder angrily.

"I'll bide my time, *Fräulein*, and do my duty in silence. Others better follow my example."

"Why are you vexed with me, Lena? Why do you never have a kind word for me?"

A grim look overspread her wrinkled face.

"I don't like ye, *Fremde*. What are ye doing here with a face like our Prassedá? No fine words for me. I distrust ye."

"Distrust me?"

She remembered how much was at stake, and was silent.

"The day may come, Lena, when you will not be so harsh," she said, rising slowly. "You loved the young master Ulrich?"

"Aye, Fräulein. I would have given my life for him."

"Then do not be my enemy," she answered, and left the room.

The old woman took up her stick and hobbled after her. There was a strange excitement in her withered face.

What did she mean? There was some mystery here. How came this English girl with the Arnim face? The young master had died in America, a land of English-speaking people. She would be just the age. Could it be his daughter? No, no, his daughter would never come in that guise to Carlshöhe. There was something wrong. She must not be duped too easily; but the Arnim face, that could not be chance. She put her wheel aside, and thought long over the problem. She would watch and wait.

Later she found a piece of paper, with

writing on it, in the tower chamber. It might be a clue to this Miss Simons's identity, so she hid it away among her treasures for future consideration. In the dim light she could not make it out. Lena's education had never been completed. In her girlhood she could read and cipher, but as her eyesight grew dim she lost these accomplishments. She had to await, therefore, a fitting opportunity for forming her theory, until Heinrich, the postman, should come round again. Meanwhile she was more deferential to Prassedá, for she had appealed to her in the Junker's name.

The young girl walked with her grandfather through the garden down to the edge of the cliff when he felt strong enough, and listened to disjointed tales of his past. Ulrich's name as often mentioned lovingly. He would tell her of his boy's bravery; how gallant and hardy he was. Memories of their quarrel never came with the sunshine. It was only at night that his son took the form of a specter to haunt him. Ulrich would have been the heir to all these lands had he lived, but he had died years before. Now Prassedá would be mistress

of his domain. Thus she learned for the first time of her prospective inheritance. She had never thought of the worldly advantage her grandfather's death would be to her. She had thought of Franzas the heir. The estates must pass to the male line, but her grandfather ignored his nephew in his talk with her.

Then again, his mood would change, and he believed Ulrich still alive and estranged from him. He would repeat the scene of their quarrel, and denounce his son's conduct in angry tones. At such times Prassedá's patience was sorely tried. It was hard to listen to his bitter words.

CHAPTER XVII.

HULDA found it extremely dull at Rabenshorst. She talked to the old General on politics until it seemed as though her patience could endure no more. While she talked she was planning a visit to Carlshöhe and some plausible method of reaching the papers. She must take time. It would not do to risk anything by haste.

One afternoon she drove with her cousin Elsa, a pretty girl of seventeen, through the Carlshöhe woods. The General suggested that they stop on their way back and inquire for the old Count, but Elsa said the road to the Schloss was steep, and Wildfeuer had not been shod recently. If Hulda were very anxious, of course she would make no objection; but her cousin did not persist.

Half-way up the road through the wood a gate barred their progress. There was no one near, and their efforts to open it proved fruit-

less. Beside the gate was a turnstile which led into a woodland path, and at a little distance among the trees an old woman was limping along, leaning on a stout cane.

"There is some one belonging to the Arnims," said Hulda, pointing her out to Elsa. "Wait here and I will make inquiries."

She sprang from the phaeton and went up the walk. As she drew near she recognized old Lena, whom she had thought dead years ago, but the old crone did not know her again behind her veil.

"Do you belong to the Schloss, my good dame," she asked, taking out her purse and dropping a silver coin into her trembling hand.

"Yes, my gracious lady."

"And is the Herr Graf better?"

"No, my lady. God willing, he will be better in another world," was the pious response.

"So bad as that? Is he alone?"

"The doctor comes weekly. At present the Herr Baron Kempen is expected. And the English nurse—"

Hulda lifted her head quickly.

"The English nurse?" she repeated. "When did she come?"

"I know not exactly," returned Lena, looking down as if searching for something among the grass. She remembered the doctor's injunction. Suddenly an idea occurred to her. Heinrich, the postman, had not called for days. She had carried the crumpled bit of paper in her bag waiting for him to decipher it. This strange lady would not gossip. Better trust her than one of her own class. She would ask her to read the writing, and learn if she had been right to doubt the girl with the Arnim face.

Hulda heard her calling as she was about to pass through the stile. Lena was fumbling in a little black silk bag that was tied by a string to her girdle.

"Would the *gnädige Frau* kindly read the bit of writing on the paper?" she asked, dropping a curtsy, "and pardon the liberty?"

"Prassedä von Arnim in Felsenstein!" exclaimed Hulda, in surprise, as she glanced at the envelope. "Why, woman, where did you get this?"

Old Lena raised her bleared eyes to Hulda's face. They gleamed as she peered behind the black lace veil, but she dropped them quickly; her wrinkled brow turned a shade paler. The strange nurse had appealed to her in the Junker's name.

"I found it in the wood," she answered, making another stiff curtsey. "The *gnädige Frau* will pardon my not recognizing her at first."

"Me? Woman, you do not know me."

"I see strange likenesses at times," she answered. "I thought *gnädige Frau* was the sainted Master Friedrich's widow, but I was mistaken. Who shall I say inquired for the master?"

Hulda bit her lips with vexation.

"Say Fräulein von Rabenhorst," she replied, and turned away.

She answered Elsa evasively when she asked the result of her inquiries. These peasants were so unsatisfactory. Should she go to Carlshöhe? How came that envelope in this old hag's hand?

The address was in Franz's handwriting. It was the cover to a letter he had written Pras-

seda from Carlshöhe during his recent visit there. Who was this mysterious English nurse? She was filled with sudden dread. Could it be Prasseda? Absurd! The girl was in Italy with Egon; but she must set her doubts at rest. A carriage passed them on the road going to D—. The Arnim arms were emblazoned on its panel. She stopped the coachman with a gesture, and repeated the questions she had asked old Lena, receiving very much the same answer. He explained that Baron Kempen was expected by the night train, and that Dr. Schultz was coming with him.

The coast was clear. Now was the time for action. She remarked to Elsa, as they drove on, that it seemed only common courtesy for her to inquire personally at the Schloss after the Count's health. Her cousin touched the pony, and started off at a rapid pace. The sea was lighted by the setting sun, and the spray dashed up to the edge of the road. As they drove by the cliff and turned into the courtyard, Hulda formed her plan.

"Drive through the wood, Elsa, and come back for me. I shall not be long."

The footman gave her a vague report. There seemed no cause for immediate alarm. Was the Count well attended? She should like to see his nurse and learn his exact condition. Certainly, if *gnädige Frau* would step into the drawing-room. The nurse was walking in the garden, he would call her.

His steps died away. She was alone. Behind that closed door was the little wainscoted room unguarded. Could she risk it?

Prassedá, in the garden, saw the man approaching, and advanced to meet him. Was her grandfather ill?

Suddenly her hand was grasped by trembling fingers, and old Lena fell on her knees before her.

"Oh, *gnädiges Fräulein!* How can you ever forgive me! *Gnädiges Fräulein* Prassedá! My stupid old eyes were blind."

Prassedá drew her hand away, startled by her tone. Who had betrayed her?

"What do you mean?" she answered haughtily. "Are you crazy, Lena? Get up and be sensible."

The woman obeyed in silence.

"Then you won't tell me," she said sorrowfully; "but the Junker would have trusted old Lena."

Her words went to Prassedä's heart.

"*Gnädiges Fräulein*," she added with dignity, "call yourself what you like. I shall serve you just the same," and weeping she went up the path.

Prassedä followed her slowly. It was probably only an old woman's fancy. Brooding over her resemblance to the dead mistress had turned old Lena's brain.

The man came down the walk with Hulda's message. A strange lady, inquiring for the master, wished to see her. This was a natural request, since she was his nurse. The lady was urgent. Did she ask especially for Miss Simons? No she wished simply to see the Count's attendant, not being satisfied with the servant's report. Very well, she would come directly.

When she reached the drawing-room the lady had gone, and Lena was standing by the outer door.

"Where is the visitor?"

"I told her you could not see her," was the decided reply.

Prassedá flushed at her tone.

"You take strange liberties," she said, shortly.

"The Junker trusted me," was her dogged answer, and Prassedá thought her crazy.

Later she appreciated the old woman's forethought. The lady had been none other than Hulda, who had risked everything to penetrate her seclusion, for according to the terms of the Count's agreement her annuity was forfeited by this act.

She learned of Hulda's presence through her grandfather, whom she found in a state of agitation bordering on frenzy. He moved wildly from one room to another, muttering incoherently, now and then stopping to listen for some sound from the outer apartment, then continuing his weary walk. For the first time he did not heed her remonstrance.

"You do not know the danger, Prassedá," he said, excitedly. "She is a bad woman. She will bring a curse on us all. Friedrich, I tell you it was an evil day when you married her."

Then he laughed low to himself. "I will cheat her yet—this Hulda! She thinks to throw dust in my eyes; but I can see! I can see! The old man has many a day to live; although you would step into his shoes!"

He sat by the window and looked out through the blinds, rubbing his hands softly together, listening now and then as if he still heard her voice.

"The Count is very well to-day," he said in a sarcastic tone. "Yes, well enough to outwit you, Hulda. You would rule at Carlshöhe. You would have Friedrich dictate to me. The wood needs cutting on the sea road, does it? You shall learn that the old Count is still master at Carlshöhe."

Then he sank back exhausted. Thus Prassedä understood why Lena had sent the visitor away. She had misjudged her. Her grandfather looked at her suspiciously when she took his hand, but recognized her. She bade him rest. His condition gave her uneasiness, and she looked for Paul's coming that night with a sense of relief.

Afterwards, when she thought he slept, he

stole softly from his bed to the iron chest where his papers were kept. He felt among the documents carefully, watching at the same time, with all the cunning of a madman, to see whether he was observed. But when she approached the bed, and looked behind the curtains, he slept peacefully, one hand slipped under his pillow, the other thrown over his head in an attitude of careless repose. His face was as expressionless as a child's. There seemed no cause for anxiety, so she left him in charge of the night-nurse, a new addition to the household, who had just come from a neighboring estate, excellently recommended. She had been nursing a patient who died after a tedious illness, and certainly could be trusted. Weary with long vigils, Prasseda went up the stairs to rest until Paul arrived.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HULDA shut herself up in her room at Rabenhorst, and tried to think. There was some mystery at Carlshöhe yet unfathomed. She had been unable to accomplish her purpose of abstracting the packet, for, as she stood on the threshold, the peasant woman passed the window. She had only time to close the door and resume her position by the table before Lena entered the drawing-room. Lena had met the servant on his way to the wood, and learned his errand. Her young mistress did not know her danger.

The *gnädige Frau* would have to excuse the English nurse, for she was busy with the master. She would answer any necessary questions, she said, dropping a curtsey and assuming a deferential manner that to the conscious plotter seemed almost mocking.

Hulda was forced to yield ungraciously, although, had she waited but a moment, Prasseda

would have appeared to answer for herself. Lena saw her safely out, and shut the door. Her visit had availed nothing.

Ulrich's rooms were unoccupied; this she had gathered from a cursory glance.

The sun set, and a moonlight night began. The rocks were clearly visible outside the window. The longer she thought over the situation the more restless she became. Oh, if she could only have the packet safe in her possession! Should she ever again have an opportunity like the one missed that afternoon? Why had this meddling old woman not come a little later? No, even then the danger would have been too great. She must not be found with the evidence in her hand.

The rooms were unguarded on that side of the house. The Count's apartments were some distance away. Paul would not arrive till late. Oh, if she only dared risk it! Then she could push back the catch on the long French windows opening on the terrace, and slip softly by. It would be the work of a moment, and her anxiety would be ended. Enveloped in a long mantle, who would recognize her?

The path through the woods was lonely, but the moon was shining. By taking the disused steps up the cliff, she could reach the Schloss in half an hour and be back before she was missed.

She must do something; she could not bear to live another day in such suspense.

The moon shone into her room. It was as bright as day; she had made up her mind.

Starting up, she took her black cloak and stole softly out upon the beach. To follow the high-road and branch off into the path they had taken that afternoon would entail too much danger. It was only by crossing the rocks passing the quicksands and climbing the moss-covered cliff that she could hope to reach the castle unobserved.

Half the distance had been traversed safely when she heard the rumble of wheels. The Arnim carriage came into sight on the highway below. It was returning from D——. She quickened her steps; she had only a half-hour's start of the travelers.

Her figure stood out in bold relief against the sky, but no one saw her except the sea-

birds hovering over the Schloss. The Count's apartments were lighted dimly; those on the other side of the Schloss were in darkness. She pushed back an overhanging vine and looked into the room; no one was there. The angel-heads supporting the mantel-piece smiled in the light of the flickering logs, but the wainscoting seemed full of imps' faces. The weather was growing colder in those September days. She drew her mantle more closely around her. All was still. The garden was flooded with moonlight; the shadows of the vases on the terrace were black spots upon the green lawn. She listened; then raised her hand and tried the window. It yielded to her touch. In a moment she was inside the room and the curtain dropped behind her, against prying eyes. How her heart beat! It seemed as though she could hear the great clock ticking outside as it did that night four years ago. She drew the bolt on the door leading to the hall. Now she was safe at last.

What if she had forgotten the secret? No; the scroll-work sank into the oak at her

touch and left the aperture free. It was full of dusty papers. She put her hand in and drew out the pasteboard box filled with crumpled letters, untouched since she had thrust it into the hiding-place. Her hand trembled. She almost let the box drop upon the table. The cover had fallen back into the closet, but she did not search for it. First she must close the panel and bind the papers in a convenient packet to hide under her cloak.

She was on her knees groping for the spring; the cherubs heads resumed their places. Suddenly her face blanched with terror, for in the mirror over the mantel-piece she saw the door moving—not the one leading to the hall, this was still bolted, but that opening on a corridor connecting with Count Arnim's apartments, to which he alone had the key. Without rising she crept behind the curtain that hung over the entrance to the bedroom, and pressed herself out of sight against the wall. The door creaked slightly as it fell back into place. Some one was there! She would be discovered, and the papers found. Why had she made this wild attempt to secure them? For years they

had lain hidden from mortal eye ; now hers was the hand to bring them to light.

Still no noise of footsteps. Had a ghost arisen to startle her ? She could see the box on the table, but dared not move. She pushed the curtain aside to see who the intruder was ; and her eyes fell on a withered hand extended over the box. A low exclamation of horror escaped her lips. It was the Count, dressed in a long gown and a skull-cap, his feet covered with list shoes, which deadened his footsteps ; his white hair fell on his stooping shoulders, and as he looked suspiciously from right to left, his black eyes gleaming, she shrank back out of sight. He drew a long, sealed parchment from under his gown and pushed it into the box among the rustling papers.

“They’ll never find it now,” he muttered. “She shall never reign at Carlshöhe. She thought to deceive me by sweet words. As if I did not know her heart. Curse thee, Hulda Golof !”

The bitter hatred of his tone made her shudder. She felt as though caught in a trap. The only means of escape, the window, was

barred by his presence. And yet better risk death at this crazy man's hands than dishonor through the discovery of those documents. He was moving towards the door; the way was clear; one spring and she might dash past him through the window. A crazy man could not denounce her. But could she let him take the evidence of her guilt? His hand was already on the door when she leaped forward and, pushing it to, confronted him. He started back in speechless rage, and waved her off, clutching the box tightly with one hand.

"You would steal it from me!" he exclaimed, "and defraud my children."

She advanced as he retreated, and seized him by the arm. After all, he was but a feeble old man. They stood opposite the fireplace on a Russian bearskin which slipped beneath his feet.

With a sudden movement he flung the box into the fire and stood before it, warding her off menacingly.

"Let them burn," he whispered gleefully. "See the blue flames leap up. Soon there will be only ashes."

He turned back and clapped his hands like a child, seeming to forget her presence. The papers shriveled into a black mass upon the coals. She waited only to make sure of their destruction; then turned to fly.

The carriage drove into the court-yard, and Paul's voice was calling outside. One moment's delay might be fatal. The old man seemed not to notice her, but when she made a movement towards the window he turned and grasped her by the cloak. Frantically she tried to free herself. Steps were echoing along the corridor. They had missed the master and were coming to seek him. She pushed him back with all her force, and he fell with a sharp cry, striking his head against the carved oak table.

He lay quite still. Could it be that he was dead?

Some one rattled at the lock. She must save herself at any cost; and pushing back the window she made good her escape just as Paul burst open the door and found the master lying unconscious on the floor.

CHAPTER XIX.

THEY lifted him on to the little bed in Ulrich's room, where he lay unconscious for hours. The doctor could not foretell the end. His constitution was strong, perhaps it might withstand the shock. No one knew how he had escaped the nurse's vigilance. The curtains were still closed around the bed. She had supposed him sleeping. Perhaps, fatigued with the strain of her last engagement, she had nodded a moment over the fire.

Paul and the doctor had heard his cry as they entered the hall.

There was nothing in the quiet room to give any clue except a charred mass on the fire.

The curtains were drawn, the window was shut. There was no evidence of a struggle. He had simply been stricken down. In searching about Paul found fragments of parchment among the logs. A red seal was attached to

one of them, which led him to believe that the old Count had destroyed his will.

Prassedá's presence in the sick-chamber of her grandfather did not surprise Paul as much as she had feared. He had been prepared for it by Schultz's description of his English nurse, who resembled the Count's daughter so wonderfully. As yet there had been no explanation between them. She placed her finger on her lips and held out her hand to him, then pointed to the dying man.

Her heart was too full to speak.

As the day began to break there were signs of returning consciousness. The doctor and Paul watched anxiously, hidden from view, while Prassedá knelt at the head of the bed and buried her face in his pillow.

The silence was oppressive.

At last the Count opened his eyes and looked slowly around the chamber.

How came he to be in Ulrich's room? Years had passed since he had visited this place, so full of ghostly memories. By that window his son had sat in his boyish days, mending his kite. He could see him

now with the sunshine on his hair and the merry light in his eyes, so like his mother's. There by the door he had stood for the last time, his face white with passion. Never should his father look on him again. There was a gulf between them deeper than the sea. He had been true to his vow. Even in death the breach had not been healed. Why had they awakened him to bitter memories? True, Prassedá had comforted him during the short span of her young life. It seemed as though he had heard her voice of late, sweet tones that fell upon his heart like music to quell its pain. This, too, was fancy. His daughter lay under the stones of the chapel, dead long ago.

She had fretted for her brother, poor child! God had been merciful! He alone was left like a column in the desert, to bear the brunt of life's storms. Some day he should go, and Hulda would reign at Carlshöhe—she and Friedrich. She was false and shallow, but by his contract his elder nephew should inherit the Castle. Could he disinherit him because he hated a woman? That would be injustice. Ulrich had called him unjust.

There had been enough wrong-doing in the past. Quarrels sometimes ended in death. Friedrich should have the Schloss, and he would curtail that woman's power in some way.

Then he remembered that Friedrich too was dead. Hulda was of no moment.

He had always liked Franz, although they disagreed at times. Still, the boy had pluck. How dreary it was in that room! The saints' heads in the wainscoting were dark with age. He must have the ceiling polished.

Hark! some one was praying, by his bedside. Who could be praying for him now? He had no friends. That brown head was like Prasseda's. He was mad, or dreaming, for his little girl had died years ago. Soon he would follow her. Perhaps he had not always been kind to the mother.

No; he did not dream. A soft cheek nestled against his hand, and Prasseda's eyes looked into his. No, Ulrich's eyes. The same true look in their azure depths that had met his chiding when the boy failed to do some trivial task.

How sad they were! She raised herself up and drew nearer. Yes; his daughter had returned to him. With a cry of joy he clasped her to his heart. Then consciousness left him, and he fell back among his pillows in a swoon.

Prassedá bent over him anxiously, and the doctor shook his head. Would he die in this faint so like death? After a while he revived and called her name.

"Where am I? Paul, are you here?" Then turning to the doctor, who held the feeble pulse, he added with a gleam of humor, "Ah! Schultz, I am not a dead man yet."

The doctor and Paul exchanged a significant glance.

The Count von Arnim had regained his reason.

He looked questioningly at Prassedá as if puzzled by her presence.

"Do I see visions?" he whispered, taking Paul's hand. "Has my child risen from the grave to haunt me? Who is that kneeling by my bedside?"

"Grandfather!" murmured Prassedá.

"I have no grandchild," he answered hoarsely,

drawing away from her. "My son is dead. I drove him from me with curses."

"And he sent me to ask your forgiveness. Grandfather, I am his child. Do not cast me from you."

"His child—Ulrich's child!" exclaimed the old man joyfully. "I have grieved for my poor son. His child must never leave me."

He passed his hand caressingly over her hair, and kissed her forehead.

"You must tell me, when I am stronger, how it happened. Why did I not know the truth?"

It was evident that he had never seen the papers.

"Prassedá's mother wrote you years ago, and sent the documents to prove her child's identity," said Paul.

The Count shook his head.

"I never saw them."

The doctor stroked his beard, reflectively. "He is quite himself," he said in answer to Paul's inquiry,— "quite rational. How long will it last? Ah! I cannot say."

Schultz looked grave. Evidently the crisis was serious. The Count could not account for

his presence in Ulrich's rooms until Paul brought him the pieces of his will. Then he remembered that there had been a struggle. He pressed his hand to his brow and tried to recollect. Like a flash it all came back to him.

"Hulda was here. I see her now. How wickedly she looked at me! She would have killed me!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I burned the will. She tried to take it from me."

"Has he lost his mind again?" asked Paul, in an undertone.

"He seems quite sane. There is no fever; his eye is calm, his mind seems clear."

"But how could it be?"

"She struggled with me," continued the Count. "I tried to hold her. She escaped by that window; but the will was burned. They will never have Carlshöhe now."

He laughed low to himself.

"He must be mad. Countess Hulda could not have been here at that time of night," remarked the doctor.

"Humph!" responded Paul. "Nothing is impossible where she is concerned. You don't know her."

An hour later the old man had fallen into a fitful slumber, still holding his grand-daughter's hand. She had been talking to him of her childhood and of her mother. He listened quietly, and murmured something about making reparation. He bade her sit where the light might fall on her face. He wished to carry the memory of it with him, out into that shadow-land where all his loved ones waited.

The end was drawing nigh. They could disguise the fact no longer. Slowly the light was fading from his face, his eyes were growing dim, but they turned toward his grandchild, till his eyelids closed in sleep.

Towards noon he roused himself and spoke to Dr. Schultz.

"I have been very ill," he said, smiling mournfully. "But I am well now."

"Yes, Count, with care you will be."

The old man shook his head.

"My days are spent, man. Tell me the truth. I feel myself grow weaker."

"No, grandfather," replied Prassedá, sobbing convulsively. "You must not die."

"*Mein Kind*," he whispered tenderly, "it is too late."

A few moments afterwards he called Paul to his bedside and placed her hand in his.

"Protect her," he said in a broken whisper. "She must have everything, *everything*. Remember."

His countenance assumed an ashen hue; only his eyes seemed alive.

Suddenly he started up as if entranced.

"Hush! Hear the voices calling! It is too late, too late."

And with a sigh he fell back dead.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN Hulda heard the news at Rabenhorst a load was lifted from her heart.

She could breathe freely now that her enemy was dead. She expected Franz in time for the funeral, for which great preparations were being made. He had left all these matters in Paul's hands, assuming himself to be the heir. Baron Kempen did not undeceive him. He would wait till they met to acquaint him with Prasseda's story, and accepted the charge without further parley.

Hulda ordered heavy mourning from Berlin. As prospective mistress of Carlshöhe, no form of etiquette, however trifling, should be omitted. What would Egon say when he heard of her triumph? Would he regret having left her victor of the field? More than two months had passed since the night when she drove Prasseda away by her bitter revelations. Where was Prasseda now? Had Egon's love for her

grown cool? Their short-lived happiness was hardly worth the sacrifice. She paced her room in a sudden accession of joy at her enemy's discomfiture.

She wished the Count could have lived to learn how she had outwitted him.

Franz arrived just before the funeral. There was no opportunity for explanation. Paul tried to tell him that Prassedá was at the Schloss, but his cousin silenced him with a look. He would hear nothing of her or his brother Egon. Her behavior justified him in the belief that she was an impostor as Hulda had intimated. He alone had been blind. Paul shrugged his shoulders. Let him learn the worst without preparation, since he was so stubborn.

"We can discuss this situation better after the funeral," said Franz. "This is not an opportune moment."

And so the time came when the old Count von Arnim was to be laid among the graves of his ancestors.

The little chapel was full of people. Prominent among the mourners sat Hulda, dressed

in trappings of deepest woe. Her black-bordered handkerchief was held ostentatiously to her eyes. She appeared to weep for a man who had insulted her during life and disinherited her in death. Every now and then Franz would glance at her sympathetically and press her hand.

Coming to Carlshöhe had roused sad reminiscences, for she had visited there during poor Friedrich's lifetime. But he should make her forget the sad experiences of her life. It was noble in her to overlook the Count's vindictive spirit. He loved her all the more for her generosity. Poor Hulda!

Paul had advised Prassedà not to attend the funeral, and worn out with the excitement and grief of her grandfather's death, she gladly followed his advice. She had told him of Egon's visit to Carlshöhe. Paul was now convinced that Egon had gone to America to replace the papers, but his chance of success was remote. He had few clues. Old Minerva, who had been in "Miss Barbara's" family for years, knew nothing of importance. An army chaplain had performed the ceremony; the witnesses were

probably dead or scattered, and Ulrich died two months later in battle. The only records had been sent to Carlshöhe. If this impulsive, headstrong woman had only had certified copies of them made, much trouble might have been saved; but women were always fools. Their best chance lay in finding the original documents, and Egon was merely wasting his time. He hoped hourly for his return.

What would become of Prassedà if she failed to prove her claim? Franz, influenced by Hulda, might dispute it. If Egon did return with the requisite evidence, matters could be settled to every one's satisfaction.

The services were over. The family had assembled in the drawing-room. It had been rumored that the Count had destroyed his will, but few people believed it, although no little curiosity was evinced at the disclosures which Baron Kempen had promised as forthcoming.

Anna was seated on a sofa, wringing her hands.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "Poor old Count Arnim, how sad his death is; and

one never knows who may be the next to go."

Paul made an effort to calm his sister, but without avail.

"I hope he has made a sensible will, and remembered all his relations who loved him."

"Yes," answered Paul ironically; "all who loved him are remembered."

"Then I shall not be forgotten," she said briskly. "I doted on him, but I had little chance to show my devotion. He was such a hateful old man, and took one up so short."

Paul stood looking out of the window with an expression of anxiety on his face. The train from Hamburg was just due; he had sent the carriage to the station on the chance of meeting Egon. Since Prassedá's revelation he had decided to telegraph the agents of the Hamburg line, thinking he might be on board of the incoming steamer.

"What detains you, Paul?" asked Hulda. "Why not begin the reading of the will at once?"

She was eager to have the ordeal over.

"Egon has been summoned," whispered her

betrothed. He could not mention the boy's name without repugnance.

"Has he not forfeited everything?" she returned indignantly.

"It was a form ; he has no legal rights. But you know Uncle Heinrich always regarded him as one of us, although he was only our adopted brother."

For the first time in years, he alluded to the fact that there was no near bond of relationship between them.

A hush of anticipation fell on those assembled, as Paul came forward, followed by the doctor.

"My friends," he said, "we have gathered here to-day out of respect to our late kinsman Louis, Count Arnim of Carlshöhe, to listen to his wishes regarding the final disposition of his property. Every one has responded except Egon, Lieutenant Graf von Arnim, the late count's distant cousin and adopted nephew, whom we believe to be traveling in foreign countries in ignorance of his uncle's death. Some of you know that the late Count made a will ten years ago by which he bequeathed his

property, landed and personal, to the eldest son of the living branch represented by Franz, Count Arnim, of England. It is my duty to inform you that shortly before his death the late master of Carlshöhe regained his reason and destroyed this will, leaving everything he died possessed of to his grand-daughter and heiress at law, Prasseda, Countess von Arnim, whom I now have the pleasure of presenting to you."

With these words he pushed back the portière and led Prasseda forward. Her eyes sought Franz eagerly. Would he forgive her? His look of scorn answered that he would listen to no explanation.

Hulda started violently when Paul finished. An expression of fury spread over her face. What right had they to declare the Count sane? The people were amazed at the course things had taken, and looked in surprise at the girl who had risen from the earth to confront them. One and all, they were against her. Paul alone was her friend.

"Who says that the Count was sane?" asked Hulda, vainly endeavoring to appear calm.

"I was present during his last hours," replied Dr. Schultz firmly. "He was in entire possession of his faculties at the time of his death. He destroyed his will in favor of his grand-child, whom he recognized as his lawful heir."

Hulda could have told another tale, but her tongue was tied. Could she confess her part in that fearful night, when she pushed him back, and he fell apparently dead? Dr. Schultz was a man of unblemished reputation, and Paul was a witness to the truth of his statement.

"It is a conspiracy," she exclaimed bitterly.

"Hush, Hulda," said Franz. "If this is true, let Prassedà have Carlshöhe. I am rich enough without it, and the Count had the right to dispose of his property as he chose."

"The right to give this magnificent estate to an impostor? Will you allow yourself to be robbed in this manner? First let her prove her legal claim. Who was her mother? Are *you* not heir at law?"

Prassedà met her defiant gaze proudly; her face was flushed with emotion.

"My grandfather recognized my claim," she

answered. "That vindicates my mother's honor."

If looks could have killed, Hulda would have slain her then.

"Where is your lover who fled with you from Felsenstein?" she exclaimed, with hatred in her tone.

The young girl cast a glance of surprise at the unsympathetic faces surrounding her. Her lover! What did it mean? Of what did they accuse her?

There was a stir in the anteroom. The attention was diverted from this extraordinary scene by hushed exclamations and whispers outside. Directly the door opened to admit Egon, covered with the dust of travel. There was a dangerous light in his eyes as he turned on Hulda. He had caught her denunciation, and her eyes fell under his look of scorn. Franz raised his hand threateningly, but Paul held him back.

"Wretched boy," he exclaimed, "have you come back at last to answer to me, whom you have bitterly wronged?"

Egon looked at him calmly.

"You have believed that woman's lies, Franz. I left the country, hoping to repair the wrong she had done an innocent girl. I left no stone unturned to defeat her ends, but I have failed. The papers proving Ulrich's marriage cannot be duplicated. The records are lost, the witnesses are dead; but I charge her here before you all with having destroyed the original papers. She confessed her guilt to me the night I left Felsenstein."

Hulda's face never changed. Except for her pallor, one might have fancied she had not heard him. Her lip curled, her eyelids drooped proudly. The man was mad. He told the tale merely to cover his defeat. She destroy valuable documents? To what end, pray? No, she scorned to deny a charge so preposterous. She met Franz's eye fearlessly. He read her thoughts like an open book. His Hulda was incapable of treachery. The boy he had loved and cherished was a villain.

"You shall answer to me for this!" he exclaimed sharply, the red color surging to his brow.

"To you?" replied Egon, contemptuously.

"You doubted the honor of a girl as pure as snow. You smirched her fair name at the instigation of that woman. Oh! I have heard it all. No, I'll not answer to you."

Hulda bit her lip at this defence of her rival. Her rage knew no bounds.

"Coward!" she cried, "to attack me and deny my betrothed the right to defend me."

"Your betrothed!" he repeated in surprise.

Before he could utter another word, Franz broke from Paul's detaining grasp and struck him a savage blow. He staggered, then threw out his hand to steady himself.

He was deadly pale. It seemed as though he had suffered death in that blow from his brother's hand. He met his eyes firmly. The company stood breathless while he waited.

Hulda smiled and raised her eyebrows slightly. They doubted his courage.

It was Franz, his benefactor, his more than brother, who had struck him down. That blow obliterated all claim of kinship.

"I am at your service, Graf von Arnim," he said coldly, and left the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE sun was setting in a bank of heavy clouds which lay threatening on the horizon. The night would bring in a heavy storm. An ominous silence had fallen on the Schloss and all within. Old Lena crept up to Prassedä's door and listened. She could hear her pacing the floor in despair, and felt helpless to relieve her misery. She hated Master Friedrich's widow. She was the cause of all their trouble. The people rejoiced that the Junker's daughter had come home to reign at Carlshöhe. Her gentleness had won their allegiance, while the Russian's imperious manner roused their opposition.

Prassedä tried in vain to find some way of tiding over the present crisis. If these brothers should fight, their blood would be upon her soul. She had been a miserable failure, bringing only sorrow to those who had befriended her.

In vain did Paul attempt to explain the situa-

tion. Franz would not listen. She should have trusted him. If she had written him the letter would have been found on the writing-table in his room. Hulda had taken good care to suppress it. It was a mad freak, her coming in disguise to Carlshöhe alone with Dr. Schultz. How could she know that Egon would leave Felsenstein at the same time and make complications? She had thought solely of her mother's name. Franz suspected they were trying to shield her. He would not believe that Egon had not accompanied her to Berlin, or that her going secretly from Felsenstein was not prompted by love for his brother. He was completely under Hulda's influence, and thought what she bade him.

Unless Egon would retract this charge against his betrothed, he should answer for it with his life. His fury against the boy was intense ; he would not listen to reason. He saw in him only Hulda's traducer.

Franz had an interview with Hulda which served to fan the flame against Egon to hatred. If she could not triumph at least she would pull the house down about their ears. She told him

that Egon had loved her once. She had not favored his suit, and out of revenge he had maligned her. The story was incredible. Those papers had never been received by the Count. How then could she have stolen and destroyed them? She begged him to forgive his foolish brother, but so artfully did she word this plea that he felt only more angered against him after she had done.

Forgive him? Yes, when he had humbled himself in the dust and begged her pardon on his knees. He should learn that she had a defender.

They were sitting in the library by the very table where she had tampered with the mail that night four years before. She lighted her candle and bade him good-night. He stood up and took her by both hands, looking deep into her eyes as if to read her soul.

"Hulda, sometimes I have felt that you did not love me," he said wistfully. "Now that we are parting, tell me that I have misjudged you. Let me feel some response to this passion which is killing me. Don't you know that I would give my life for you gladly if I thought you cared.

Gladly? Why, I would throw myself over the cliff to save you pain. Listen, don't smile." His pressure on her hands hurt her.

"You think me foolish and wild? All my life I have yearned for love. I wanted to feel that I was necessary to some one's existence. You have put me off, made light of my feeling. God, how you have maddened me by your mocking laughter,—and yet how sweet it was! It thrilled me; even when it cut deepest I loved you. You could not help it, nor could I. Now that we are parting, tell me that you love me. Tell me."

He clasped her ardently to his breast. His vehemence stifled her. She closed her eyes against his passionate gaze. She opened them and answered it.

"Yes, Franz, I love you," she replied.

At the moment she spoke the truth. He was her avenger. Egon had denounced her before the world. He had accused her of a crime. She would have killed him as he stood there that afternoon, had she been strong enough. The outcome of this duel would be Egon's death. The thought filled her with exultation.

He should feel her power. Franz would avenge her.

At that moment she spoke the truth. She loved him.

“Good-bye,” he whispered, kissing her on the lips. “Good-night! God bless you!”

The apartment where the old Count had died was closed. Hulda slept beyond. She was obliged to pass through it to reach her rooms. Her hand was on the knob of Ulrich’s door, but she hesitated to enter that haunted chamber. She stumbled in the darkness and her candle flared. The corridor was draughty, for a storm was rising. She hesitated, and turned back doubtingly. Should she call Franz? He would think her childish. No, a clear conscience lends us courage. She must simulate what she did not feel.

The door opened noiselessly at her touch. Her steps echoed on the polished floor. There was no fire on the hearth; the room was desolate. The lightning flashed into the darkened corners and terrified her. She set the candle down with a trembling hand, and sank breathless on a chair,

There he had lain. She could see his white face turned upward and those sightless eyes. Should she ever forget them! The thunder rolled in the distance and the rain began to fall in torrents. Outside the surf lashed against the rocks in wild fury. Why did she not tear herself away from this scene of horror?

Suddenly her eyes fell on the scroll-work near the floor, and rested there with fascination. The wood-work needed mending; a long, narrow crack was breaking half-way up the wall. One of the cherubs' heads had sunk into the oak.

Then the truth dawned on her.

The panel was open. It had not slipped back into the socket. That night in her hurry she had omitted to shut it tight.

She looked about her fearfully. What if some one should come? The rain fell steadily. No one would of his free will enter that ghostly chamber.

She knelt down behind the table and crept towards the wall. Slowly the panel rolled back. The cover of the box which held the papers had fallen in like a wedge to prevent its clos-

ing. She pulled it out with sudden force, and something white rustled on the floor. Stopping, she picked it up, and held it towards the light. In her hand were two long papers fastened together by a yellow ribbon. She untied it mechanically. Were those papers alive? Could she not destroy them? How had they escaped the flames?

“This is to certify that Ulrich von Arnim—” she read no more. The truth came to her with fearful force. She had watched them burn until nothing remained but ashes—letters, picture, and everything of no import, except the evidence wanting to make Prasseda heiress of Carlshöhe; this by some mischance had been caught in the cover and saved to brand her as a thief and perjurer.

What should she do?

The wind blew round the Schloss in fitful gusts and shook the shutters. There was no fire on the hearth. Her maid was waiting in her room. What should she do? These papers must be destroyed at once. She could not risk having them in her possession a moment.

“This is to certify that Ulrich von Arnim—” she could read it in letters of fire upon the wall; others might come and read it too. A gust of wind blew out her candle. She was alone in the dark with her secret.

Flickers of lurid light filled the room and blinded her. She heard the door softly opening behind her. The Count seemed to stand there, an avenging specter, holding his gaunt hands over the fire to warm them.

“Let it burn,” he said, wagging his head with horrible cunning. His eyes glowed in their empty sockets. The head was a skull.

“What are those papers you are hiding from me?” he seemed to cry. “The certificate of my grand-daughter’s birth and my son’s marriage?”

Was she going mad? If she could only get out of the house away from the demons that pursued her. The saints gleamed down at her amid the vivid lightning and laughed at her terror. Where could she fly? The tapping of a stick along the hall warned her that Lena was near. She sprang behind a curtain to hide herself from the old hag’s eyes. She would.

denounce her. She would have no pity. The window blew open with a crash. The old crone would come to shut it and see her crouching there.

Out into the night she fled like one possessed. The papers seemed to burn her hand. Should she throw them away? No; the wind would blow them back again. Should she tear them to bits the pieces would be found and put together. If she could reach the quicksands she might bury them deep away from the sight of curious eyes.

Half maddened with terror she reached the cliff. The spray dashed into her face and blinded her. Voices of furies screamed in her ears. All her past misdeeds rose to confront her, little omissions of her childhood, long forgotten.

Still she held the papers tightly clutched in her hand.

In descending the rough steps of the cliff she slipped and fell. Her thin dress was drenched. Her hair, loosened by the wind, lashed in her face; yet she stumbled on. Her one idea was to reach the quicksand. Then all danger

would be past. Those papers must be sunk in the sand. Egon should not triumph.

The rocks loomed up, dark and forbidding. Now she had passed them. Beyond that stretch of woods lay the treacherous beach. Would her strength last? How dark the night was! The trees slipped by like black ghosts. The storm was increasing. A deafening clap of thunder, simultaneous with jagged, darting lightning, stunned her. She clung to a tree for support, but the remorseless wind whirled her into space, and she fell face downward in the sea-grass near the shore.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE storm still beat against the walls of Carlshöhe. Egon listened to the moaning wind, and shuddered. An hour after sunrise he would meet his brother under the great oak in the forest.

In vain had Paul called them savages, and besought them to desist. Franz answered with a lowering brow, and Egon was silent.

He had spoken the truth. For Prassedà's sake he must not withdraw his charge, even if Franz killed him.

Egon put his affairs in order. He had little trouble in doing this. His earthly possessions were few and easily disposed of. Should he see Prassedà? Better not. It would unnerve him. He would give his life for her; how could she doubt his love. No, he would not see her.

Paul came and sat with him an hour. All his cynicism had gone; he besought Egon to listen to reason. It was a child's quarrel, un-

worthy of them both. Egon answered him with a smile. Then his companion left him in disgust.

The fire burned low on the hearth. He was thinking of his life.

What a record to leave behind ! Not one deed to live after him. To be sure, he was young, and had not had much time. Still he might have done so much better if he had tried.

Why had he not died in Paris when danger threatened him ? He would not have been there to stand opposite his brother's pistol in the morning. The hand had saved him for a cruel fate. The hand ! For weeks he had not seen it. His ancestress had withdrawn her protection. She thought it no longer worth while to guide him, and she was right. He was a useless fellow, better out of the way. It had led him to Prasseda, and protected him from snares. He wished he might see it again.

He took up a candle and went out into the dining-hall. There was the portrait, a copy of which had startled him at Felsenstein. The original had more spirit, the eyes seemed alive,

but in the wavering light of the candle the figure looked ghostly.

"She did me more harm than good," he thought, with a sigh.

He saw his face reflected in a mirror as he passed. It was pale and weary. He must get rest for the encounter. They might think he was afraid.

He threw himself down as he was upon his couch, and fell into a fitful sleep.

He fancied some one was bending over him, and started up. The day was beginning to dawn. Birds sang in the vines outside his window, the sun was shining aslant through the trees.

He rose and threw open the blinds; the dew glistened on the lawn, and little cobwebs lay like film upon the grass.

It would soon be time.

The house oppressed him, and he went out to the edge of the cliff. The sea was calm again; the storm had gone and left no trace behind except the white-capped waves. The sea-gulls wheeled screaming round his head. He turned back towards the house.

Near the edge of the lawn a shadowy figure stood, dressed in gray robes, that were hardly distinguishable in the clouds of vapor rising from the ground.

He passed his hand over his eyes absently. He was not fully awake. It was the fog that obscured his vision. He looked again. Now the form had vanished.

The sun cast little rays among the tangled green. He saw the figure deeper in the wood, hovering like a column of mist among the tree-trunks. He moved towards it unconsciously.

Snails were lying in his path; the air was heavy with the odor of moist earth. Squirrels darted across the rocks and sought refuge in the neighboring trees; still the phantom floated on before his eyes.

Suddenly she raised her hand and beckoned. He could see the ring glistening on her finger. He would solve this mystery before he died.

On he wandered by the trunks of fallen trees. She passed lightly over all obstacles with an undulating motion, as though she were

upheld by wings. He kept his eyes fixed on her, and noticed not the path he took.

Deeper into the wood, he followed. Still she hid her face. A gray veil covered her from head to foot; her eyes shining through it seemed to hold him spellbound. The up-raised hand still beckoned him on. How the birds sang! The brook, swollen to a torrent by the recent storm, rushed by. The soft morning air fanned his cheek and rustled through the underbrush at his feet.

The hour would soon be past. He must return. Franz would be waiting. No, that relentless hand held him by a spell.

He was gaining on her now. The snake-head was quite visible, with its wicked diamond eyes, and the tapering fingers looked pale in the morning light. She wound her arms around the trunks of trees as she went on. She was faltering; her light steps grew weary; her head drooped. No; she regained her strength and renewed her speed. He had not reached her yet.

A leafy screen fell between them, a tree whose branches touched the ground.

Had the earth opened at her feet? His eager hands swept the green barrier down, and there, at the foot of the tree, she lay trembling like a wounded bird, her face still covered by the veil. No phantom, but a woman—his cousin Prassedá.

He knelt down and took her in his arms. Her heart fluttered against his breast wildly. Her strength was almost spent. Tenderly he threw back the veil that hid her face. Their lips met in a passionate kiss. What time had they to think of right. He knew only that he held her in his arms.

She loved him. She clung to him with a passionate entreaty more eloquent than words. He must not leave her. All through the night she had thought of some expedient to hold him from his purpose. At first unconsciously in Paris her hand had saved his life. Afterwards while waiting on the balcony she had seen him through the lattice, not knowing that he was her cousin. She stretched out her hand to take up the flowers lying on the railing, and held him back again from danger. She was staying at the hotel with friends who

crossed from America by the same ship, waiting for Franz to join her and take her to Germany.

Later, when they met at Felsenstein, she recognized him, and when he told the story of the hand determined to keep secret her identity. He might have foolish fancies about her. The ring, inherited from her father, who brought it to America, she never wore except when Egon was not present. She always kept her hands gloved after his first warning. Once he had said the hand would lead him anywhere. He would obey its bidding blindly. Then in the despair of the past night she had hit upon this scheme, to mislead him in the mazes of the wood, when he must perforce miss his appointment. She thought not of his honor, but his life, which he would give for her. She knew how strongly Franz was enraged against them both. He would kill Egon without remorse. Once his hate was roused he was implacable. It was a desperate chance, but it succeeded. She found her lover sleeping on the sofa in his room, and bending over awoke him by a touch; then she led him away by

force of will from danger. Now they must unwind her clinging arms to reach him.

He gazed long into her eyes, and held her close for fear that death might come even then to part them. It was a bitter moment, to clasp her thus and know that he would never feel her embrace or look into her face again. He kissed the hand which had saved him from danger in the past. This time it would not avail.

Then rising from his knees, he unclasped her arms and strove to put her from him, but she resisted his efforts.

"You shall not go, Egon!" she cried in terror. "What is my life without you? Let them think what they like. Franz is unworthy of your hate. You shall not risk your life for me. I love you, Egon, do you hear! I love you. Your life is not your own to throw away."

"My darling," he answered tenderly, "I must go."

"I know all you would say. You have been insulted. You must vindicate your honor. Hulda is your enemy; she wishes your death.

Don't you know that she would rather see you dead than happy with me? She shall not triumph. Listen, Egon. Oh, do not strive to free yourself! You will have to drag me with you over the stones, back to the place of meeting. His bullet must first pierce my heart to reach yours."

Her agony was terrible. It wrung his heart. When he would reason with her, she placed her hand on his mouth and silenced him.

"We can go back to America together," she whispered faintly, with her arms around his neck; "there no one will know. What do I care for Carlshöhe? Do not leave me alone in the world. Oh, Egon, have pity!"

She sank in the wet grass at his feet and clasped his knees. Her voice was choked with sobs. He could not bear to leave her thus; and yet, the hours were passing. They would think him a coward.

"Prassedá," he said, "this parting is like death to me; but I must go. Franz took me when a child. He has given me everything. My life is his to take if he chooses: he struck me yesterday. At first I felt enraged beyond

reason; but I have thought the matter over. It would be cowardly in me to wrong you. I should have my own way to make in the world. By rights you should inherit Carlshöhe. In any case Franz will settle something on you. He will do this for your father's sake. Some day your rights will be proven. Some day he will learn that I was not the dastard he thought me, and I know how bitter his regret will be."

"You talk as if it all were ended, Egon," she cried; and then, as if struck by a sudden idea, "You can not mean that you will not defend yourself?"

He smiled mournfully.

"Defend myself? Do you think I would raise a pistol against my benefactor—my friend, to whom I owe even my daily bread? Thank God, Prassedá, I have not sunk so low as that."

She threw her arms around him with a low cry.

"And you ask me to countenance a murder?"

He heard the town clock strike in the distance; the hour was already past; he must break away at any cost.

"Prassedá, let me go," he said in a tone of entreaty.

Suddenly she relaxed her hold, and sank back as if dead in his arms. He sought to retrace his steps, but the burden dragged him down. At the edge of the wood he met old Lena limping down the hill. He called her and left the fainting girl in her care. Better leave her now before she awoke to consciousness and pain.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DOWN by the beach Paul and the doctor stood waiting. Franz had gone on alone. Still Egon did not come. The sun rose higher and swept the sea, but there was no sign of him anywhere. Paul said he hoped the boy had taken to his heels. It would be sensible, though rather out of the usual course. He characterized the whole proceeding as absurd ; but there was an expression in Franz's face that made him uneasy, for he was a dead shot. Paul muttered a curse and remarked that he washed his hands of the whole matter.

"Hulda is the devil," he said.

"Oh, it will soon be over!" returned Schultz in a cheerful tone. "They will fire in the air and settle it easily."

"Not so easily as you fancy, my good Schultz. There will be work for you yet," he

muttered, drawing his cap down about his ears. The morning air was chilly.

Franz went on, some distance ahead. The ravages of the storm were visible everywhere. Here were trees fallen across the path. In the distance the quicksand trembled in the morning light. He reached the oak-tree at the top of the wood, and stopped to rest. Why did the others not come and put an end to his suspense?

He could see Egon's boyish face peeping out through the broken rim of an old hat. They had gathered chestnuts together under those trees when his brother was a child. How Franz had loved him! He would have given his life for the boy in those days. What a happy laugh he had! It was contagious. None could hear it without joining in his merriment. But he had given his protector nothing but pain.

First he had stolen the girl Franz would have married from Felsenstein, and now he slandered the woman his brother loved. It would be only justice to kill him. He had not thought Egon's nature was so wicked and revengeful. But Hulda would not state what was false.

Why had he troubled himself about this girl? Better have left her to starve in her native mountains. She had brought only dissension into their midst.

He would give Egon one more chance to acknowledge that he had lied. Time was passing. Had his courage failed him at the last? He was not a coward.

The wind was blowing from the sea. It stirred the grasses near the shore. A limb broken from the great oak bore evidence to the fury of the storm.

Something was lying in the grass near by. A woman's shawl.

It looked familiar, but women's shawls were all alike.

There were prints of high heels on the sand. A woman's foot had pressed deep into the shelving beach. Not far away lay a red morocco shoe half filled with pebbles. The shoe was Hulda's. How came it there?

He took a step further; then recoiled in horror.

She was lying in the grass, face downward. He knew every turn of her graceful body. The

dark hair lay in masses on her shoulders, the hands were thrown forward as if to save herself in falling. Had he not kissed them at parting, in passionate fear that he might never see her again? Now he dreaded to meet those sightless eyes. He dared not touch her.

But this was cowardice. Perhaps he might yet bring back life to her frozen veins. He lifted her up tenderly. The open eyes were fixed in horror; the quivering mouth was half parted as though an exclamation of terror had passed her pallid lips. The hand was rigid, clasped so that the nails were imbedded in the flesh.

She was dead hours ago.

He sat there holding the body to his breast and strove to impart some warmth to her cold heart. In vain. Could he ever forget that fearful look? It burned into his brain. He called her by endearing names. He pressed passionate kisses on the cold, unresponsive mouth. He took her dead hand in his and chafed it vigorously. What was it she was holding clenched in her palm? A paper tied with a yellow ribbon. A love-letter? His veins ran cold at the thought. His jeal-

ousy was roused even in death. Had he possessed her love? Perhaps this was the secret of her presence there. This might tell why she had left the castle in the storm alone at night. She might have been enticed away and murdered.

He wrenched it from her hand, trembling at the thought. It was parchment, and, though blotted, still legible, in spite of dust and rain.

“This is to certify that Ulrich von Arnim—” he read aloud. Did his eyes deceive him? Had he really done the boy an injustice, after all? He read it to the end, and the accompanying documents which proved his cousin right.

His understanding was dull. He must have time to grasp the depth of her infamy.

And he had loved her so! He had placed his whole faith in her word, had repudiated his brother, nay, would have shot him in cold blood for her sake.

It was horrible!

He laid the body back upon the grass, covered the cold hands, and pressed her lids over the staring eyes.

Life was ended for him.

When Paul and Schultz arrived he handed them the papers; pointed mechanically to the dead woman; then leaving them without a word walked towards the Schloss, just as Egon emerged breathless from the wood.

* * * * *

They buried her with her kindred in Russia, far away. Her name is never mentioned at Carlshöhe, where Egon and Prasseda live happily together, forgetting even the evil she would have wrought them.

THE END.







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